Princeton. Theol. Sem.

Library.

LIBRARY
OF THE
Theological Seminary,
PRINCETON, N. J.
BX 5037 .B5 1855 v.4
Bickersteth, Edward, 1786-1850.
The works of the Rev. Edward Bickersteth
Book,

THE WORKS

OF

THE REV. EDWARD BICKERSTETH,

RECTOR OF WATTON, HERTS.

VOL. IV.

THE CHRISTIAN HEARER.

NEW YORK:
ROBERT CARTER & BROTHERS,
285 BROADWAY.
1855.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2014

https://archive.org/details/worksofrevedward04bick

CONTENTS.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	THE GENERAL IMPORTANCE OF HEARING THE WORD	1
II.	NATIONAL BENEFITS OF HEARING THE WORD	18
III.	PREACHING THE WORD THE SPECIAL ORDINANCE OF GOD FOR SALVATION	42
IV.	THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST THE GLORY OF CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLIES	60
V.	THE HOLY SPIRIT RECEIVED IN HEARING THE ONLY SOURCE OF GENUINE PROFIT	70
VI.	THE RELATIVE SITUATION AND RESPECTIVE DUTIES OF MINISTERS AND PEOPLE	92
VII.	DIRECTIONS FOR HEARING THE WORD	127
VIII.	THE IMPORTANCE OF REFLECTING ON WHAT WE HAVE HEARD	153
IX.	PRACTICAL OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD	164
X.	ANSWERS TO OBJECTIONS AGAINST PRACTICAL OBEDIENCE	177
XI.	OBSERVATIONS ON THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER	188
XII.	THE PROMISED UNIVERSAL DIFFUSION OF DIVINE KNOWLEDGE	207
XIII.	THE DANGER OF NEGLECTING DIVINE TRUTH	229
XIV.	THE BLESSED RESULTS OF FAITHFUL HEARING	246
XV.	ADDRESS TO DIFFERENT CLASSES, EXHORTING THEM TO ATTEND TO THIS DUTY	262

PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION.

The Author was led to the subject of the following Treatise, in the discharge of his Ministerial Duty, by considering how very few in this vast metropolis, and throughout this favoured country, habitually hear the Word, though preached in the very midst of them, in comparison of those who greatly, or altogether neglect that duty; and how very few, even of habitual hearers, fully improve what they hear to their spiritual edification.

There is among multitudes both of rich and poor in this country, through their wilful neglect, nearly as great a famine of hearing the Word as though they had been born in a Heathen land; with the awful aggravation of guilt, that they live in a country to which God has in this day given a full share of Scriptural Truth.

The Author does not expect to remedy, on a large scale, the evil which he, in common with many, deplores: but if he can afford a little help, and stir up a few only to individual and practical reformation, it will be worth all his efforts. And if he can excite Christians more fervently to pray for the full outpouring of the Holy Spirit, far more extensive benefit may arise, even from this attempt, than can easily be anticipated.

But the actual state of things should be fully known. It appeared from the Rev. Dr. Yates's able Pamphlet, "The Church in Danger," published in 1815, that there were, at that time, IN LONDON AND ITS IMMEDIATE NEIGHBOURHOOD, that is, within eight miles of St. Paul's Cathe-

dral, NINE HUNDRED AND FORTY-SIX THOUSAND PERSONS, without any accommodation in a parish Church, or any beneficial knowledge of a parish Minister; without any participation in the devotions and instruction of our Liturgy, and therefore probably without any regard or attachment to the Established Church. Dr. Yates says, "The number of Christians dissenting from the Establishment will not be found materially to affect the present argument, as it bears a very small proportion to the aggregate just stated." We cannot, however, but rejoice in the aid which they afford, in varied ways, to the general cause of religion.

Active measures have, indeed, been lately taken for building many new Churches; yet such has been the increase of the population of the Metropolis and its vicinity since the period above mentioned, that probably the result of a similar enquiry would still shew nearly the same affecting state of things; especially if it be farther considered that few of the churches are filled in the proportion assumed by Dr. Yates in his several calculations.

It was well observed by this writer, "Such a mine of Heathenism, and consequent profligacy and danger, under the very meridian (as it is supposed) of Christian illumination, and accumulated around the very centre of British Prosperity, Liberty, and Civilization, cannot be contemplated without terror by any real and rational friend of our Established Government, in Church and State, and is surely sufficient to awaken the anxious attention of every true Patriot, every enlightened Statesman, every sincere advocate of suffering humanity, and every intelligent and faithful Christian."

Nor is this state of things confined merely to the Metropolis; it is, in a great measure, true of most parts of the Country, that but a small proportion attend the ministry of the word; and more particularly in places where there has been a rapid increase of the population, without corresponding means being provided for their instruction. Dr. Chalmers, answering objections about Sabbath Schools,

says, "Many of the objections proceed on an ignorance of the actual state of a crowded society; it not being sufficiently known how utterly alienated the great majority of our young are from all Christian opportunities; and that there is an unobserved Heathenism among us which stands as much in need of being aggressively entered upon from without, as the Heathenism of antiquity stood in need of Apostles. Such is the lack of Churches, and such is the dreary and unprovided extent of our City parishes, that the majority of our people may be said to live in a state of excommunication from all the privileges of a Christian land."

The result of the returns which Bishop Sumner, the present Bishop of Winchester, obtained when in the Diocese of Llandaff, speaks volumes. Some parishes had only one in twenty, others one in twenty-seven, and others one in thirty-eight, attending public worship. "In the whole diocese, the gross number of communicants is stated to amount to 4134, and of attendants at Church to 19,169, on a population exceeding, (in 1821,) 150,000 individuals of all ages."

Greatly are we indebted to those who have the patience and perseverance to obtain such returns, and the Christian courage plainly to state to them. But how low is the state of Christian England, and how urgently do the times call us to press the duty of hearing the word! The Bishop admirably thus notices one of the assigned causes of this deficiency, the activity of the Dissenters. "If it be meant that the Dissenters are more active than the Established Church in promoting the cause of religious truth according to their own views, it follows that we have been unmindful of our solemn promise, "to be ready with all diligence to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange doctrines, contrary to God's word."——"Nay, if it could indeed be believed that the example of ministerial activity were to be found only in the ranks of dissent, the friends of religion might well be excused for adopting the words of the Apostle, until a portion of the same zealous and energetic spirit

were infused into the ministrations of the members of our own community,—*What then, notwithstanding every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached, and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.*"

Such a state of things calls for the sympathy, and demands the exertion of all who have at heart the welfare of our country, and the advancement of real religion. Nor need we be discouraged: it is an indication of a reviving state of the Church among us, that these evils have been openly exposed, and that steps are taking to remedy them. Is not this one fruit, at least in part, of Missionary exertions? While Christians are beginning to feel for the distant Heathen, this very feeling has a salutary reaction, is leading them to care still more for those who are living as Heathens in their own country. The District Visiting Societies now establishing in London under the highest ecclesiastical sanctions, are a most important means of forwarding this object. May it please Almighty God to grant that the building of fresh Churches may lead many to inquire into the duty of attending those Churches! Happy will the Author be, if this volume be made useful in affording such persons seasonable information, or in bringing those who have hitherto carelessly or inconstantly attended Public Worship to a regular and devout attendance: much will he rejoice, if any of his brethren in the Ministry shall find this publication in any measure assist them in exciting an increased attention to those public means of grace: without a due regard to which religion never flourishes, and the full attendance on which is one of the tokens of its real prosperity.

It may be desirable to add a few remarks on different parts of the work now submitted to the reader.

The second chapter might easily have been enlarged to a considerable extent, but this would have too much increased the bulk of this volume.

Names of distinction among Christians have been, as much as practicable, avoided. When brought forward to support or oppose classes of men, without any other evi-

dence or argument than the mere name, in the best view they merely assert the individual's opinion that his own sentiments are correct: but as they are often used, they infer either an unfounded pretence to infallibility; or a recommendation of implicit faith in human authority; or a dogmatical discouragement of all scriptural inquiry and investigation.

The Author has felt the extreme delicacy and difficulty of some of the points discussed in the latter part of the Sixth Chapter; but, knowing how much the minds of many pious individuals are exercised on that subject, he did not feel at liberty to decline stating the views, which, after the best consideration that he could give the subject, he had adopted. "It is too true," as a friend has remarked to him, "that many clergymen do not so minister as to fulfil what the Church and their duty require from them; but false doctrine, and dead formality and a worldly spirit, are less and less, blessed be God, disgracing the clergy; and where these things so prevail as to render their ministrations of little worth, there are subsidiary means of edification, quite consistent with the discipline of the Church, to which recourse may be had, while waiting and praying for better times."

"The leaven of truth and zeal, is spreading extensively through the Church: many of her ministers and other members who may not yet enter fully into her evangelical doctrines, nor yet rise as she requires them above the world, are seriously labouring to do good; and if some of these have unhappily imbibed unfavourable views of the most zealous and consistent members of their own communion, it only furnishes a strong additional motive to those looked at with unfounded suspicion, conscientiously to avoid every thing which may be justly objectionable. The truly religious members of the Church are, happily, under all their shades of difference and their past feelings of mutual disaffection, making gradual approaches to one another; and nothing will tend more, through the blessing of God, to accelerate their union, or to make the Church the bul-

wark and glory of the Empire, than a conscientious adherence, in that devout and heavenly spirit which she requires, in all her members, to her discipline and her ordinances."

There is great danger of self-wisdom, self-exaltation, divisions, and many other evils creeping in under the pretext of purer religion. The Author has known cases where the young, with new and lively impressions of the reality and magnitude of true religion, have left pious parents to go alone to the Church, while they have gone elsewhere as a matter of conscience and separation from the world. There may be more real conscience in going with their parents: there may be no separation from the spirit of the world, though a man constantly attends where the truth is faithfully preached.

The Author has, he hopes, sufficiently guarded his statements from disrespect towards other bodies of Christians. He is far from such a feeling, and by no means undervalues union and harmony among all Christians; and does from the heart desire that grace may be with all them that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. But he is persuaded that it is most conducive to real charity and edification, that, while mutual kindness is cultivated, Christians should constantly and regularly attend the public ministry of the Communion to which they belong, at the stated seasons of worship in that Communion.

Looking at the history of the Church on the large scale, he is convinced that much good often follows patient waiting, and prayer and forbearance, and much evil ensues from rash separation and multiplied divisions.

He can truly say, that he is not insensible of existing evils in the ministry of the Church to which he belongs; nor of the great danger of hearing doctrines from the pulpit not agreeable to the word of God; nor of the piety and devotedness, and labours of love, of very many ministers and private Christians in other denominations, whom he rejoices here to regard and to love as brethren, and with whom he hopes hereafter to spend a blessed eternity, mag-

nifying in one song of praise the one Redeemer of all. He can fervently unite in the prayer of his own Liturgy, to that one Saviour, "that all they that do confess thy holy name, may agree in unity and godly love;" he longs for the day when Christians, of all names, that love Christ, shall be ONE, in the full meaning of the Saviour's prayer; however near the connection might be in other respects, he would ever feel it his duty to impugn and condemn a worldly, proud, self-exalting, covetous, sensual spirit. External things have been too much magnified, and lesser differences too eagerly pressed; and we have not followed the Apostolical rule, *whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.* He can therefore truly rejoice, that through the labours of those who differ from him in Church Government, divine truth is much more widely diffused through our country than it otherwise would be, and extensive spiritual good has thus been effected.

Let it ever be recollected, that after all that all faithful ministers of every denomination do, the world, the flesh, and the devil, have in every place many more devoted and constant followers than the best ministers; and the number that altogether refuse to hear, vastly exceeds those who attend all Christian teachers put together.

He apprehends that on those points which might seem too exclusively adapted to Churchmen, the general strain of his sentiments may with equal propriety be applied to members of any communion, and be addressed by ministers of every denomination to the people who attend upon them. Though truth is never to be sacrificed, yet the spirit of unity and love, and especially among members of the same body of Christians, is of immense moment.

But in giving therefore the directions on those points, he felt that there were dangers to which Christians are exposed, besides those of neglecting the truth. All ministers, who have had much religious experience, of whatever communion they may be, will, he thinks, agree that the spirit of wandering is truly injurious; that the indulgence of a

fastidious, hypocritical, judging, self-conceited, and separating spirit, is very prejudicial; that hearers sometimes mistake from ignorance, and sometimes object from prejudice; and far too little pray for their minister; it is to these things that he has specially directed their attention. He has in this edition, more strongly stated the scriptural duty of hearing the truth. He did not feel called upon to enter more fully into topics, to do justice to which would require another volume, and the various bearings of which call for a large spirit of Christian wisdom and charity, both in the author and the reader.

The Author having enlarged some other parts of the work, has omitted a chapter on Private Study, which was but little connected with the subject of this book. He has included that chapter in another work entitled "The Christian Student."

May the Holy Spirit descend more and more on the Church and on the world, and give efficacy to this and every attempt, however feeble, to increase religious knowledge and promote religious improvement, till at length *the knowledge of the glory of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea.*

ISLINGTON,
August 12, 1829.

PRINCETON
THEOLOGICAL
SEMINARY

THE CHRISTIAN HEARER.

CHAPTER I.

THE GENERAL IMPORTANCE OF HEARING THE WORD.

When the ground in summer has become parched and barren from a long drought, how delightfully refreshing are the grateful showers that descend from heaven, and clear the atmosphere, and cool the air, and water the earth. A freshness appears in the verdure, the plants revive, the flowers burst forth, new fragrance perfumes the garden, and all wears the aspect of reviving and returning health and animation.

Such is the effect of a faithful preaching and hearing of the word of God. Like the earth which silently receives the rain, and exhibits the blessing in its varied and lovely and beneficial produce ; so the practical hearer insensibly receives a benefit which his life manifests, and which blesses all with whom he has intercourse. *My doctrine*, says Moses, *shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew ; as the small rain upon the tender herb, as the showers that water the earth.* St. Paul conveys similar ideas when he says, *The earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God.*

A free and gratuitous gift, directly from our heavenly Father, is the rain that fertilizes the land on which it falls; and similar is the greater blessing which we have now to consider, to which man is mainly indebted for his spiritual fertility and fruitfulness.

Great is the importance, as well as the blessing, of hearing the word. Consider, first, THE DIVINE AUTHORITY WITH WHICH IT IS DELIVERED TO US. When the Ministers of God speak according to the will of God, and by virtue of their office, it is to be regarded as if God himself addressed us. The foundation of their office is a Divine commission—*Go ye, and teach all nations . . . to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. Our Lord told the seventy disciples whom he sent out as teachers—*He that heareth you, heareth me: and he that despiseth you, despiseth me.* Luke x. 16. The whole dispensation of the Gospel is a divine message, an embassy from God to man. What the Apostles could in the highest sense, as divinely inspired, declare, ministers can, in an inferior, but, as far as their testimony is according to God's word, in a solid and true sense, still declare: *God hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation: Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.* As the ambassador's voice is the voice of the king, so is the minister's voice the voice of God.

It is true then, Christian reader, that God speaks to men by his ministers.* The ministry of the word is a divine embassy to your souls. The foundation of all duty, and of all acceptable obedience, is the will of God. He addresses you, and communicates his mind and will to you,

* Bishop Jewell observes, "Some there are that thus say, 'O that I might hear Christ, or Peter, or Paul! I would verily believe what they should preach!' This is foudness and curious vanity; for whensoever thou dost hear the minister of God preach unto thee the word of life, and teaching thee the truth of the Gospel, thou hearest Paul, and Peter, and Christ himself. If thou despisest the word of God spoken unto thee by him, and the grace which God offereth thee by him, thou despisest Christ himself, and heapest up the heavy displeasure of God against thee."

by his ministers; and he requires you to hear them, for they are *the messengers of the Lord of Hosts*, and the people should *seek the law at their mouth.* Mal. ii. 7. Consider the majesty and greatness of Him who sends the message—thy Creator, thy Preserver, thy Judge. If a servant disregard a master's word; if a subject refuse to hear his king; if a child turn away from a father speaking; the insult and injury are obvious: but to refuse to hear the Lord of all lords, the King of all kings, the universal Father, surely includes each particular offence with special and peculiar aggravations.

It is in infinite tenderness that God speaks by man to his creatures. If he himself were to speak personally with us, we know by a striking example, (Exod. xx. 18, 19.) that we could not bear the brightness of his glory. Even the mission of holy angels would terrify, (Matt. xvi. 6; Luke i. 12, 29; ii. 9.) and could not meet our necessities, for they have never tasted the bitterness of sin, nor themselves experienced the blessedness of pardon and reconciliation, and therefore could not speak with fellow-feeling and sympathy. How unsearchable here is the divine mercy and condescension in committing unto sinful men *the word of reconciliation* for their sinful and offending brethren! It has been observed, "When the kings of the earth appoint ambassadors, they generally depute them only to kings; nor would they deign to send a solemn embassy to their own rebellious subjects, when vanquished, disarmed, and condemned. But the King of kings and Lord of lords appoints ambassadors from himself to poor apostate worms, and helpless perishing sinners. Earthly princes select persons of dignity and eminence to represent their persons and act by their authority on these important occasions; but the Lord of glory deputes pardoned rebels and reconciled enemies to go to their former companions in rebellion on this embassy of peace."

Thus, though *the treasure* be put *in earthen vessels*, ministers are still *Stewards of the mysteries of Christ*, and ambassadors from God to man. They are sent of God himself to

dispense the treasures of his truth, and preach the gospel of reconciliation, that men may believe and be saved. Hence, no one can enter the ministry in the Church of England, without a public declaration that he trusts that he is inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon him that office and ministration.

Do you try to shake off the conviction of the Divine authority of the preached word, by talking of the weakness of the instrument? remember, that an important message is not the less important because the *person* of the messenger may have little to command respect. Do you say that he may commit mistakes, or utter inelegancies, or even fall into some errors? but remember, again, that there is an infallible touchstone of the truth. Acts xvii. 11. They who put off the conviction of their sins, by the thought that the voice which they hear from their minister is not the voice of God, only manifest that they have no disposition to obey, and deceive themselves, and farther despise God, seeing they add insult to rejection, by denying the messenger as well as the message.

Rather, Christian reader, let the infinite condescension and compassion of God, in stooping to our weakness and infirmities by a human and weak messenger, so far from suggesting any excuse for slighting the message, add a fresh motive for gratefully listening to all that is said. Let us often enquire whether we have received this momentous embassy with all the seriousness and reverence which *the voice of God* imperatively demands. Augustine says, "If God speaks, woe be to him that does not hear!"

The IMMENSELY-WEIGHTY INTERESTS WHICH THE WORD BRINGS BEFORE US, shews farther the importance of hearing. Moses told Israel, *Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, . . . for it is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life.* Deut. xxxii. 46, 47. It is to regulate every day of our lives: it is to direct every thought of our hearts, every word of our lips, and every part of our conduct; destitute of its influence, we are blind, ignorant, and wretched, living and labouring

without adequate ends, and not only not furthering, but constantly weakening and destroying our true interest and happiness: under its influence, we are wise to salvation, filled with solid peace, and in the path-way to eternal life and blessedness. It is the only light athwart the dark valley of the shadow of death, and discovers to us sinners, a free and complete salvation; the Almighty God, our Friend; his only-begotten Son, our Redeemer; his blessed Spirit, our Teacher and Comforter; and his eternal bliss, our everlasting home.

HEARING THE WORD IS THE APPOINTED MEANS OF RECEIVING SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS. If you want spiritual life, *hear, and your soul shall live;* (Isa. lv. 3.) *the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.* John v. 25. If you want nourishment in the spiritual life, *desire the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.* 1 Peter ii. 2. If you want comfort, the office of the ministry is *to comfort all that mourn.* Isa. lxi. 2. If you want sanctification, *sanctify them,* prays our Redeemer, *through thy truth; thy word is truth.* By what was the Church of God first commenced? by hearing. Acts ii. 41. By what is it that men are saved? through hearing: (1 Cor. i. 21; Rom. x. 8.) the power is of God; he gives the increase; but hearing is the means to be used by us. By what are difficulties cleared up to us? By hearing; as our Lord shewed that Malachi iv. 2, intended to foretel John the Baptist coming in the spirit and power of Elijah: (Mark ix. 12.) so Philip made Isaiah liii. 7, intelligible to the Eunuch (Acts viii. 32.) and our Lord brought out the doctrine of the resurrection from Exod. iii. 6. (Matt. xxii. 31.) Or, how are the Scriptures personally applied to our individual cases? by hearing; so the men of Nazareth had Isa. lxi. 1, applied to them in particular. The late Mr. Robinson of Leicester well asked, "Who are instructed in the way of truth and righteousness? who are awakened to a proper sense of their guilt and danger? who are warned and effectually persuaded *to flee from the wrath to come?* who are conducted to the knowledge of salvation? to faith,

hope, and peace ? Who are animated with true Christian zeal, cheered with the lively prospect of heaven, and advancing in all the graces of sanctification ? are not these the persons who have listened with serious attention to the word of life and received it in love ?" (See his "Christian System.") In short, if you want a cheering evidence that you belong to Christ, it is a grand and distinguishing character of those who shall hereafter dwell with him—*My sheep hear my voice.* Our Lord solemnly asserts, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation.* John v. 24. How incalculably important is that with which God has connected such blessings ! If it be only as we regard the word that we have reason to hope that we are disciples of Christ, and going to dwell with him for ever, how infinitely needful to hear that word !

THE CONTINUED MINISTRY OF THE WORD FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE CHURCH, shews its importance. The plan of public instruction seems to have existed from the earliest ages. Moses was assisted in instructing the people by the seventy Elders : Numbers xi. The people were to *observe diligently to do according to all that the Priests and Levites shall teach.* Deut. xxxiv. 8. Jehoshaphat sent Levites and Priests through the land, *and they taught in Judah, and had the book of the law of the Lord with them.* 1 Chron. xvii. 9. Israel was without *the true God,* when they were *without a teaching priest.* 2 Chron. xv. 3. On the return from captivity, Ezra, the Scribe, *stood upon a pulpit of wood which they had made for the purpose,* and so taught the people ; and the Priests and Levites *read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.* Neh. viii. 4—8. We are informed, (Acts xv. 21,) *Moses of old hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day.* Our Lord himself so preached in the synagogue at Nazareth, (Luke iv. 16—29,) and on the Mount. His very business on earth, (who is Lord of heaven and

earth,) was going about preaching that men might hear. He sent forth the seventy disciples and the twelve apostles to preach the word. In the book of Acts, we see that as it was the constant practice of Christian teachers to preach, so it was the habit of Christians to hear the word. In the primitive Church the same practice was continued. Timothy was enjoined to *preach the word.* 2 Tim. iv. 2. Clement says to the Corinthians, "Hearkening diligently to his words, ye were enlarged in your bowels, having his sufferings always before your eyes." Justin Martyr says, "Upon the day called Sunday, all that live either in city or country meet together at the same places, where the writings of the apostles and prophets are read as much as time will permit; when the reader has done, he who presides, gives an admonition, instructing the people, and animating them to the practice of such lovely precepts; at the conclusion of this discourse, we all rise up together and pray." Tertullian shows (in his Apology) that Christians met together for the purpose of reading the Scriptures, exhorting and reproving: and he says in another place, "The Scriptures are read, psalms sung, and discourses publicly delivered." Cyprian mourns under the persecution as hindering them from seeing the assembled fraternity and hearing the bishops discoursing. Athanasius, in his apology to the Emperor, shows how they crowded to the church in his days at Alexandria. Ambrose, Augustine, and others, also testify how the people continued to hear. We need not descend farther, as these facts sufficiently show that the public ministry of the word has been the invariable practice of the Church. While the fact of the public ministry, continued from the earliest ages, is thus clear, all history testifies, that religion proportionably flourishes or declines as the practice of hearing obtains, or is disregarded. Wherever vital piety, with all its holy fruits, abounds generally and extensively, there the word is faithfully and largely dispensed, and listened to. In Papal countries the word of Christ is little heard. In Mahomedan countries, it is almost unknown. In Heathen

countries it has never been declared. In Protestant countries an increasing interest in it is accompanied with an increasing growth of general morality and godliness.* History and fact bear full evidence then to the general importance and advantages of hearing.

THE SPECIAL ADVANTAGES WHICH WE ENJOY, shew us our peculiar obligations to hear. The Israelites had many special advantages for becoming wise unto salvation. *He shewed his word unto Jacob, his statutes and judgments unto Israel.* Psalm cxlvii. 19. Moses appeals to them, *Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire as thou hast heard, and live?* Though this, in its literal meaning, was only true of one generation of the people of Israel, yet the whole nation were peculiarly distinguished by this eminent and special advantage, that *to them were committed the oracles of God.* They exclusively among the nations of the earth had the full privileges of divine Revelation afforded to them, with all the light and truth, the gracious promises and blessed prospects, which it discovers.

But we Christians have superior advantages, which bring a higher responsibility; our neglect of them is more dangerous; by our improvement of them we may derive a larger benefit. The whole of the sacred Scriptures is now in our possession, and exalted as the publicly acknowledged Code of faith and duty. The Apostle's statement—*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son,* belongs to us. We may every day *hear in our own tongue the wonderful works of God.* O that we were duly sensible of the immense blessing of having the word of Christ so richly and so abundantly as we have!

Then consider our peculiar national advantages. We,

* It has been observed, "Without this hearing, we see the power of religion lost, and the awe of God wear off the spirits of men, as appears in the atheism of Popish countries, where hearing the word is in a manner swallowed up by the mass; and in the general depravity of those among ourselves who turn their backs on this part of the worship of God."—*Eastcheap Lectures.*

in this highly-privileged country, the glory of the Reformation, the bulwark of the Protestant faith, where the ark of God seems specially to have rested, have been blessed of God in an eminent degree. Look at our Reformers, Cranmer, Latimer, Ridley ; look at those of later days, Hall, and Hopkins, and Beveridge ; look even at comparatively modern times, at Milner, Robinson, and Scott, and say, whether God's truth has not by them, and in their writings, been most plainly placed before our eyes. Then look more particularly at your Sabbath privileges, and the abundance of the Divine word read or proclaimed by his ministers, from thousands of pulpits every Sabbath. *The word of God is not bound,* his house is not closed, his ministers have liberty to preach from Sunday to Sunday, and we have opportunity to go and hear. Hundreds of millions of our fellow-creatures there are in Heathen lands, who have none of these advantages ; and many millions there are in Roman Catholic countries to whom the Bible is yet a sealed book. It is not so with us. God affords us eminent and increased facilities in this day ; the Holy Scriptures have been largely distributed, there has been a remarkable and extended revival of religion, and on every side faithful ministers preach his gospel. What more could have been done for us ?

These advantages lay upon us an accumulated load of obligation. It was said to Israel, (Amos iii. 2.) *You only have I known of all the families of the earth, therefore I will punish you for your iniquities.* It was said to those who heard our Lord, *Woe unto thee, Chorazin, woe unto thee, Bethsaida ! for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you.* Matt. xi. 21, 22. What then shall be said to those in Britain who shut their eyes to the light which shines so clearly, and close their ears to the truth which sounds so distinctly. *Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.* Luke xii. 48. Is it not im-

portant therefore for us to hear? O, let us British Christians duly improve our singular advantages for becoming *wise unto salvation;* and as we are favoured beyond others in our privileges, may we be eminently devoted to God, and according to our special blessings, be universally *a holy nation, and a peculiar people, zealous of good works!*

THE FREEDOM WITH WHICH WE MAY NOW OBTAIN SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS further shews the importance of hearing. A day is coming, when if we now refuse to hear God's words, no possible effort or sacrifice can obtain for us the least spiritual blessing, or comfort. Luke xvi. 24—31. But now every blessing bestowed through faithful hearing may be READILY obtained. The blessings of salvation are FREELY given. Not only is the invitation from God to sinners to return, free and spontaneous, but the blessings are granted *without money*, and *without price.* It would not meet our necessities that the poor and needy were invited, had they to purchase the blessings which they require with some equivalent. They are therefore bestowed freely. There seems to be in the minds of the sacred writers, a manifest care to announce the doctrine of free salvation so fully as to exclude all doubt. There is often on this point a remarkable repetition of expression. Thus St. Paul describes our being justified, to be *freely*, and *by his grace;* and he asserts our being saved, to be *by grace, through faith*, and *that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works.* Isaiah invites all—*Come ye, buy, and eat, without money*, and *without price;* without any compensation from man, or any deserving on his part. So St. Paul tells Titus, *not by works of righteousness which we have done*, but *according to his mercy he saved us.* The value of this repetition is very great. In the pride of our unhumbled hearts, we are peculiarly disposed to rely on our own doings, rather than on the grace of God; and to imagine that we must by some acts of our own merit the blessing of the gospel: and depression and sense of guilt in the contrite, leads them to fear that they can have no title to, and shall for ever lose, such inestimable benefits.

By a free salvation, the proud are humbled, and the depressed lifted up; *boasting is excluded*, and all glory given to God. But if this be the case, O how important to avail ourselves of the golden opportunity for receiving such rich blessings! how important to listen, to hear, to repent, to believe, and be saved!

This will be seen in one farther consideration, THE EARNESTNESS WITH WHICH GOD HIMSELF PRESSES US TO RECEIVE HIS WORD. Some of the most affecting addresses in the Bible are on this point. *O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments!* Isa. xlviii. 18. *O that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!* Ps. lxxxi. 13. *O that they were wise, that they understood this!* Deut. xxxii. 29. How earnest is God in his gracious invitations, as if to set before us in the most lively way, the immense importance of eternal things! *Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk, without money and without price;* Isa. lv. 1. *As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ's stead.* 2 Cor. v. 20. This earnestness shews the immense importance of attending to the Gospel, while it implies man's indifference to it, and God's tender commiseration and compassion. Men when thirsty are sensible enough of their need; but souls destitute of spiritual blessings, have by nature no desire for them. Their attention must be roused by earnest calls and affectionate entreaties. Though men be famishing, they perceive not their want of spiritual food; though they greatly need it, they desire it not. There is in the mode of expression in Isaiah lv. 1, an ardour of feeling, a repetition of entreaty, a vehemence of invitation, which shews the importance of accepting it. It is a case of life and death. If the traveller comes not to the water, he droops, he dies, in the wilderness. There is no other fountain, no other way of gaining relief. Disregard this, and you lose every thing. Attend to this, and you pass safely on to your joyful and eternal home. Thus earnest is God in his

invitation. O remember who it is that invites—the Lord of heaven and earth ; He who is perfect truth. Reader ! refuse not to listen to the joyful sound. God would not so address his sinful creatures, were not the subject a matter of infinite moment to them. There is a reality, a value, and a magnitude in the concerns of the immortal soul far beyond our highest thoughts ; and surely, that we should by our own negligence, wilfully perish, when salvation is thus freely and earnestly set before us, is grievous and lamentable beyond conception !

How unspeakable is the love of God to man ! He might justly have left us to perish in our sin and rebellion ; but he so loved the world, that he gave his only Son to die for us : and as if this were not enough, when we carelessly disregard the blessings which he has thus procured for us, he sends to invite us, to reason with us, and to persuade us to embrace the invaluable mercies obtained at so costly a price. God would not be at all this cost for a thing of inferior moment. All this love cannot be slighted without immense danger.

The MOST AWFUL THREATENINGS, having reference both to this world and the next, ARE DENOUNCED AGAINST THOSE WHO REFUSE TO HEAR. It is a terrible and awakening history to a spiritual mind ; *My people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me ; so I gave them up unto their own hearts' lusts, and they walked in their own counsels.* Ps. lxxxi. 11, 12. The guilt of such is now declared to be more aggravated than that of any former dispensation. Heb. ii. 2, 3 ; x. 28, 29 ; xii. 35. *It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah than for them,* (Matt. x. 14 ;) and they are described as falling into irretrievable and endless ruin. Prov. i. 24—31 ; 2 Thess. i. 9.

Once more—THE WORD WHICH WE NOW HEAR WILL JUDGE US IN THE GREAT DAY. The preached gospel will follow us into another world, and will there appear either against us to condemn us, if we have disregarded it,—or for us, to justify us if we have received it. *He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him ;*

the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him at the last day. John xii. 4, 8. Men now throw every contempt upon it. The gospel is preached in their very towns and streets, and multitudes never hear it at all, and multitudes disregard all they hear. O how will such be astonished and confounded to find that word, which they reckoned little better than folly, or altogether despised as foolishness, exalted as the rule of final judgment, and that which shall decide their never-ending condition !

The importance of hearing may be put into another light, by considering the weakness of those objections which are sometimes brought against this duty.

Thus it is often said, I CAN READ AND LEARN AT HOME: I have good books in my library, and there are better published sermons than any I am likely to hear, and I can think of these at my leisure, and turn them over and over in my mind. What! will you pretend to be wiser than God? God has commanded you to hear his ministers. Hearing is a divine appointment. You cannot at home obey the injunction to hear his truth, and that of *not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together.* O venture not to impugn by your vain reasoning the wisdom and authority of the great Legislator, or to set aside his authorized mode of doing you good by equivalents and expedients, subversive in this case of the obedience which you owe to Him ! There is a sympathy of feeling from the delivery of the truth among many gathered together. There is a life and power in the faithful ministry of the word ; the voice, the earnestness, and the affection of the preacher, infinitely more affect the heart, than a sermon which is merely read in private, can possibly do. How will God from your own conduct condemn you ? Worldly men do not prefer reading a play to hearing it. Be assured that Christians will not, and cannot, when they act in character, attend to only one part of their duty, and that at the time when they should be fulfilling another. It will be sufficient for them to know that God ever manifests his special blessing in the assemblies of his people. Exod.

xxv. 22 ; 2 Chron. vii. 12—16 ; Matt. xviii. 20. O lose not all the interest in the blessing promised, by perversely choosing to walk in your own way !

But you farther object, THERE IS NOTHING NEW IN WHAT I HEAR : I know it already : it is the same thing over and over again. But do you not make a mistake, if you expect that the minister should be always delivering something new ? It is true, that a wise and diligent minister will not fail *rightly to divide the word of truth.* He will give the result of his own study and experience, and therefore original views of divine truth : and in this respect *every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasury things new and old.* Matt. xiii. 52. Yet the ministerial office consists much in reminding, (Rom. xv. 14, 15.) and stirring up, and establishing those that are informed. 1 John ii. 7. In the words of St. Peter, it is *to put you always in remembrance of these things, though you do know them ;* (2 Pet. i. 12,) or, as St. Paul says, *to write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe.* Phil. iii. 1. Hearing the word is God's plan for nourishing the soul, just as eating food is his plan for nourishing the body ; and as you need the same kind of food day after day for your body, so you need this same kind of instruction repeatedly for your soul. There is good reason to believe that our Lord delivered to different congregations several of his discourses over again. These observations are not intended as an excuse for indolence in the minister, but as a guard against fastidiousness in the hearer. It was an old objection made against attending sermons, " We hear the same thing over and over ! " and St. Chrysostom (in his 3rd Homily on the 2nd Thessalonians) thus answers the objection :— " And do you not hear the same thing in the theatre ? have you not the same sight at the horse-race ? Are not all things the same ? Does not the same sun rise every morning ? Do you not eat the same meat every day ? I would ask you, seeing you hear the same things every day,

what portion of the Prophets, what Apostle, what Epistle, was read? But you cannot tell: they are perfectly new and strange to you. When therefore you are disposed to be idle, you pretend the same things are read: but when you are asked concerning them, you are as men that never heard them. If they are the same, you should have known them: but you know nothing of them. For this reason you ought to attend, because we bring nothing strange or new to your ears." Oh! in the great day of account, how glad would the now neglectful hearer be, could he but once more have the opportunity of hearing and accepting those gracious invitations which he now slights as things he sufficiently knows!

But it is still farther objected, THE MINISTER THAT I CAN HEAR DOES NOT EDIFY ME: he is weak, foolish, and of small ability. Leaving to a subsequent chapter the consideration of the respective duties of ministers and people, we will allow the truth of your objection; but still it is no sufficient answer to the duty brought before you. What if it should be true of your minister, as it has been of many others, *that God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of this world, to confound the things which are mighty, and base things of this world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things which are!* 1 Cor. i. 27, 28. Nay, still more, are you in earnest for your eternal interest? What if *it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe,* (1 Cor. i. 21,) and you should be among the happy number! Herbert quaintly, but justly, says—

> The worst speak something good: if all want sense,
> God takes a text and preacheth patience.
> He that gets patience, and the blessing which
> Preachers conclude with, hath not lost his pains.

Remember, you have the ministry, not of angels, but of men, and God has therein consulted your real interest and edification. Refuse not then the treasure on account of the earthen vessel which contains it. If really hungering and thirsting after righteousness, you will gladly receive

genuine food for your soul, though not set before you in the manner best suited to your taste. Nor is there any Christian so wise and learned but that he may receive benefit either from a different mode of treating that which he knew before, or by having it afresh presented to his attention.

There are other inferior objections, which still sometimes keep men from hearing the word. Thus there are some in superior stations, heads of families, and persons of rank or learning, who seem to THINK THEMSELVES ABOVE HEARING: it will do very well for the common people, and for their children and servants; but as for them, they need it not. O strange infatuation! are they above God who commands them to hear? have they not also a *Master in heaven?* They expect obedience from their inferiors, while they themselves disobey a plain direction of their great Superior. They would directly dismiss a servant who disobeyed repeated injunctions, and yet deceive themselves by thinking that they may with impunity despise the Divine will. How if it should be found that their fancied wisdom is a folly above the most extravagant and absurd weakness of those they most despise! *The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.* Nor is the case better with those who plead their BUSINESS AS AN EXCUSE FOR NOT HEARING. What is it but a plain confession of their blindness and depravity. They acknowledge that they are so blind, that they do not see their eternal interests to be the great concern and business of life; that they are so depraved, that they are not ashamed to avow their very blindness as an excuse for their sin. Nor can we allow any more weight to another excuse, I CANNOT RECOLLECT WHAT I HEAR. We recollect what we are interested in and attend to. A man in business will recollect a great variety of particulars which are needful to be remembered; a servant will bear in his mind a message from his master; all will remember a temporal benefit promised them. The great reason of forgetfulness is, we want a real concern about our salvation! The poor sometimes say, WE HAVE NOT SUITABLE CLOTHING! Why should that more prevent

you going to hear, than it does going to visit your friends, or to get your food, or to receive directions from your earthly employers? Consider if the real meaning of this be not, My pride will be offended by contrast with others, and I do not think my soul worth the humbling of my pride.* Others think UNFAVOURABLE WEATHER QUITE A SUFFICIENT REASON FOR ABSENCE. There are those who judge otherwise. There was a pious lady who was blind, and yet, after she became pious, to the end of her life, (for thirty-five years) constantly, twice every Sunday, in rain, hail, or snow, as well as on fine days, she went through all weathers to hear her stated minister. Her soul eminently prospered. Thus like Anna, who for *fourscore and four years served God with fastings and prayers night and day*, she left an example condemning those who for slight reasons stay at home.

Is not the hidden and secret cause of all these difficulties really this—I do not like to be restrained from my own way—I do not like the effort which it requires to go. I do not like to be reproved for sin—I prefer present recreation and self-indulgence. And what is this, but rebellion against the Most High? and where will this end, but in certain and irretrievable ruin? Break manfully and at once through all these obstructions. Delay no more. There is a happiness ready for you of which you have not yet tasted. Hear the voice of God, and you shall enjoy privileges and blessings of which you have at present no conception, and which you would not part with for all the world.

* There are some things which KEEP THE POOR FROM CHURCH, that it may be well briefly to notice. In various parts of the country, many will attend in the afternoon, who do not come in the morning. They indulge themselves with more rest—the wife wants to prepare a hot dinner for the family—to get the children dressed out—and sometimes poor people are such bad managers, that they have even to wash their clothes on Sunday morning. Christian females, in visiting the poor, might do much good in pointing out the evil of these different habits, and the way to remedy them by a little care and forethought, and the blessing which the fear and service of God would bring to the whole family. There are other cases where little children prevent parents attending; but much could be done by a little management among the poor themselves. How do they contrive when they leave home for worldly things, for the market, for pleasure? Their contrivances for worldly purposes will generally answer all their objections. A careful and pious wife will soon learn how to provide on the Saturday all that is needful to make her husband and family comfortable, without interfering with the duties of the Sunday.

CHAPTER II.

NATIONAL BENEFITS OF HEARING THE WORD.

Besides the reasons which have been already noticed, affecting us as individuals, there are other considerations, on the Importance of Hearing the Word, which affect us as members of society. The constant preaching and full reception of the word of God, is one great means of advancing national prosperity.

We will not enter at large into the beneficial influence of Christianity on the temporal happiness of man. It has already been sufficiently shewn* how prejudicial has been the tendency of Pagauism in all domestic relations, and in civil and social life : and that the improvement made since the introduction of Christianity can only be attributed to the Gospel. Nor will we dwell on the general benefits arising from the pastoral office of faithful ministers in their respective parishes through a country. Their residence, their personal intercourse, their domestic and ministerial visits both among rich and poor; their principles, and conversation, and labours, have an immense local influence of the most beneficial kind. We would chiefly confine our remarks in this chapter to national advantages connected with that scriptural preaching and faithful hearing, which will ever be found to be the most lively, powerful, and effective means of imparting and maintaining genuine Christianity, with all its blessings. We say scriptural

* See Bishop Porteus' Beneficial Effects of Christianity on the Temporal Concerns of Mankind, proved from History and from Facts.

preaching, because human devices, mere controversy, novelties of pretended philosophy, cold statements of truth, superstition, or enthusiasm, have no tendency to do good. Only the doctrine of a crucified Saviour, with all its consequences and lessons, delivered in simple dependance on the grace of the Holy Ghost, is *the wisdom of God*, and *the power of God.*

The preaching of the word BRINGS DIVINE TRUTH PROMINENTLY BEFORE ALL RANKS AND ALL CLASSES. Its very nature is, that it must be done in public, and must therefore be known. It is like lifting up a standard which all may see, or sounding a trumpet which all must hear. Persons may, or may not, read books ; may, or may not, meditate on what they read ; may, or may not, hear private religious conversations : but where large towns are filled with places of worship, and every village has its church, they must know that there is a public declaration of religious truth. The attendance of their neighbours is calculated to rouse them to attend, or at least to bring the subject before their minds. This prominent and aggressive character of public preaching is especially valuable, as men are naturally disposed to put off and lay aside all religious consideration.

MINISTERS, in the discharge of their office, HAVE FULLY TO STATE RELATIVE AND SOCIAL DUTIES, and are able to enforce them WITH OBLIGATIONS OPERATING IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES, AND WHERE HUMAN MOTIVES CANNOT REACH. Without entering at large into the minute details which the Holy Scriptures give of all the relative duties of Kings, Magistrates, Judges, and Subjects ; of Parents and Children ; of the married state ; of Masters and Servants ; nothing can be more clear than that those principles and that conduct which is eminently calculated to promote integrity, humanity, harmony, mutual benevolence, active diligence in every station, and the universal good of the whole state, are in that holy book every where inculcated. If the spirit of the Christian Religion animated any nation, the people would be united, the rulers righteous, and the

kingdom prosperous, peaceful, and blessed in the highest degree.

Look at its efficacy with regard to Rulers, and all having power over others. Christianity turns them from ambition, and lust of dominion, and desire of mere human glory. It rectifies the great principles which direct and regulate their conduct, and puts them under an authority which no merely human constitution can impart, even that of an Almighty King, over all ; shewing that all power is received from him, is held under him, and must be accounted for to him. It brings them under the influence of those high and holy principles which tend to make men just and peaceful, righteous and merciful, restrainers of every evil, and promoters of every good ; and thus puts all the weight of power, rank and elevation, on the side of the real welfare of the state.*

And with regard to subjects, the Scriptures place loyalty and obedience to rulers on a ground far higher than mere

* Augustine, in his Treatise on the City of God, (Book 5, chap. 24.) shews, in his account of the truly happy Emperor, what is the real happiness of those in authority, which he afterwards illustrates by the example of Constantine, Theodosius, and other Christian Emperors ; he says, "We Christians do not say that Christian Emperors are happy because they have a long reign ; or die leaving their sons in quiet possession of their empires, or have been ever victorious, or powerful, against all their opposers. These are but gifts and solaces of their laborious, joyless life. Idolaters, and such as belong not to God, may enjoy them: because God in his mercy will not have those that know him to believe that such things are the best goods he gives. But happy they are, say we, if they reign justly, free from being puffed up with the exaltations of their attendants, or the cringing of their subjects, if they know and remember themselves to be but men. If they make their power a means to promote the true adoration of God's majesty; if they love, fear, and honour him; if they long most for that empire where they need not fear to have partners; if they be slack to revenge, quick to forgive ; if they use correction for the public good, and not for private hate ; if their pardons promise not liberty of offending, but, indeed, only hope of reformation ; if they counterpoise their enforced acts of severity, with the like weight of bounty and clemency; if their lusts be the less, because they have the larger licence; if they desire to rule their own, rather than others' estates ; and if they do all things, not for glory, but for charity, and, with all, and before all, give God the due sacrifice of prayer for their imperfections: such Christian Emperors we call happy; here in hope, and hereafter, when what we look for comes indeed."

The Reformer Bullinger takes a similar view, in an address to Edward VI. prefixed to the second Volume of his Decades, bidding him hold it for a most undoubted truth, that true prosperity was to be procured by him no other way than by submitting himself and his whole kingdom to Christ, the highest Prince, and by framing all matters of religion and justice throughout his dominions according to the rule of God's word. The whole of the address (published in 1550) is a striking display of true Christian politics.

human legislation; they shew that the powers that are among men are ordained of God, and make obedience to human authority a part of the will of God. Thus submission, and honour, and tribute, are to be rendered not from fear, but for conscience; as a divine obligation; as a part of the law of God.

Let Scriptural truth then prevail, and it is impossible that either tyranny or treason, oppression or insubordination, can extensively exist. In fact, as nations consist of individuals, families, and neighbours, that which eminently promotes the happiness and prosperity of the lesser circles, at the same time advances the general welfare of the whole country. As the parlour is, so will be the family, the social circle, the neighbourhood, the province, and the country; it is the circle nearest to the centre, which propels each concentric circle to the utmost border of the lake; let family religion flourish, and the country must flourish; let social and relative duties be discharged, and national righteousness will elevate and bless the whole empire: and nothing but the divine authority of God's word has majesty, and power, and efficacy to accomplish these results. Those individuals who are most constant and regular in their attendance on the ministry of the word, are those who are most diligent as rulers, most loyal as subjects, most honest as tradesmen, most faithful as husbands and wives, most liberal as men of benevolence, and most active in every good work, as well as most backward to every evil work.

The preaching of the word has a REMEDIAL POWER OVER ALL THOSE EVILS INTO WHICH A NATION MAY HAVE SUNK.* IS A NATION SUNK IN BARBARISM? the preach-

* Bishop Middleton, in a Sermon preached at *Calcutta*, in 1820, powerfully urges this principle. He says, "What is the difference between the state of the world at present, and as it existed two thousand years ago? It is the difference which has been made by the preaching of the Gospel. If any doubt this assertion, let him turn his eyes to the condition of those regions on which the Sun of Righteousness has not yet risen. Some profess to expect all improvement from a natural expansion of the human powers: but is it not constantly affirmed and believed that the state of this country is precisely such as it was in the days of Alexander? unless indeed there be reason to suspect that it is somewhat deteriorated. On the other hand, do we not

ing of the Gospel is the main spring in civilization ; it is the grand civilizer of the savage. In proportion as it prevails, it gradually removes ferocious and cruel practices, and in their place infuses kindness, urbanity, and suavity. IS A NATION ENVELOPED IN IDOLATRY ? it is the appointed means of turning them from dumb idols to serve the living God, and a means that has never been perseveringly tried without success. IS A NATION ILLITERATE AND IGNORANT ? it promotes every kind of valuable knowledge. There is so much of antiquity and history, of geography and chronology, of learned languages, and of arts and sciences, embodied in the Bible, and it goes so directly to the origin, and leads to the result, of all things, that scriptural knowledge eminently tends to advance the general cultivation of the great mass of mankind. IS A NATION PERFIDIOUS AND UNWORTHY OF CONFIDENCE ? the preaching of the Gospel diffuses a spirit that leads to faithfulness in treaties and peace among nations, and that promotes those commercial virtues by which confidence is secured, and commerce extended. Jovian, perhaps the first really Christian Emperor, under many temptations to a contrary course, executed with the utmost fidelity a disadvantageous treaty. HAS A NATION FALLEN INTO GREAT PROFLIGACY AND WICKEDNESS ? let the Gospel be fully preached, and it will raise the standard of public morals ; many will become real Christians, and the whole community will more or less be influenced by their example to turn from open sin ; vice will be discountenanced, and true morality extended : and what greater national benefit can be conferred ? *Righteousness exalteth a nation : but sin is a*

know that the highest degree of knowledge and holiness, of civil liberty and of social happiness, do actually exist, where at that period a state of things prevailed, as bad perhaps in all respects as any which we now contemplate ? To reclaim our ancestors from their idolatrous and cruel superstitions, was apparently as difficult and certainly as benign a task as any which the church would now accomplish. And thus it is throughout the world: nations become enlightened and happy in proportion to their Christian knowledge, and to the purity in which they have received and maintained the faith of Christ ; or in the words of my text, in proportion as the Church has made known to them the manifold wisdom of God."—See his Sermons and Charges, pp. 123, 124.

reproach to any people. Again, HAS A NATION BEEN GROANING UNDER CRUEL AND OPPRESSIVE LAWS? the healing and salutary principles of the Gospel, when fully preached, make their way through various channels, and almost imperceptibly, into the minds of those who frame and pass the laws of a country; they enter into legislative enactments; they influence those who execute them; they regulate courts of justice; they spread sentiments of sympathy, tenderness, and compassion even for the guilty, and diffuse universal love and kindness. Or is a nation still ENVELOPED IN THE DELUSIONS OF ANTICHRIST? the word of God dispels those delusions.* Bishop Jewell, on 2 Thess. ii. 8, says, "The Apostle speaks of the preaching of the Gospel, which is mighty to do all that whereunto he appoints it, shall make his (Antichrist's) doings manifest, and let all the world see that he was not sent of God; that he did never set forth the glory of God; that he has not sought the salvation of his people; that, in matters of faith and all his life, he is adversary to Christ.—Princes make their conquests by power and strength, by fire and sword, and engines of war; but God shall beat down his adversaries with the rod of his mouth, by the true preaching of his word." Once more: DO EVILS COMMON TO OUR FALLEN NATURE PREVAIL IN EVERY NATION? the preaching of the gospel suggests thoughts of mercy to provide against them all. This has filled our own happy land with charitable institutions, alleviating woe of every character, and meeting the wants of man in every variety of form that sin has introduced. What institution of this kind may

* Bishop Pilkington, in his Exposition of Obadiah, published in 1562, thus illustrates this truth. "When Charles V., the Emperor began to reign, Luther and Zuinglius began at the same time to preach; and whether he stopped or hindered the gospel more with all the help that his ghostly and superstitious prelates would give, than they with their scholars have set it forth, and shewed the wickedness of Popery and defaced its pomp, let them judge. The Pope, with his partakers, have had strength, power, policy, wit, wisdom, armory, guns, horses, harness, men and money, and whatsoever they could devise. These men have fought with preaching, writing, and giving themselves to the fire for the truth's sake. Their weapons were tongues, pen, ink, and paper: never shedding blood but their own, and ever seeking how to save men's souls; sparing no labour, nor fearing any displeasure. So mighty a weapon is the undefiled law of the Lord."

not be traced to the gospel! And, very generally, the ministers of the gospel are the first spring, the most constant supporters, the most effective advocates, and the great stay of such institutions. In short, by the full diffusion of the gospel, war, where not prevented, is ameliorated ; slavery, where not removed, is softened ; the female character, instead of being degraded, is elevated ; and universal peace and justice, truth and righteousness, contentment, holiness, and happiness, are established and flourish.* *Happy is the people that is in such a case ; yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord !*

Again, ONE OF GOD'S GREATEST CURSES UPON A COUNTRY IS TO REMOVE THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD. If the absence of preaching be the greatest national evil, how great a blessing is it to have the constant privilege of hearing his word ! The Scriptures put the national evil of not having an opportunity to hear the word in the strongest light ; (Amos viii. 11, 12.) *Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land ; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water ; but of hearing the word of the Lord : and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north, even to the east ; they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it.* Realise the case of *a famine of bread.* What distress it spreads over a country, and how it alarms and agitates every individual ! In the famine of seven years, recorded in the history of Jacob, they hastened from all lands to Egypt to buy food ; and Jacob, in this grievous need, was obliged to part with his beloved Benjamin. Then realize that of *a thirst for water*. What will not men do to satisfy their thirst ? What distress was there in the want of rain for

* Apparent exceptions, such as the divisions of professing Christians, their eager strifes, fierce contentions, and bloody persecutions, form no just objection to this statement. Those who *live godly in Christ Jesus*, must expect, and will indeed, from the corruption of man, meet with opposition ; but the principles of the Gospel dispose REAL Christians to return not *railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing ;* meekness, forbearance, forgiving of injuries, fervent and universal love, endurance and not infliction of persecutions, especially mark their character. The faults of NOMINAL Christians, and the inconsistencies of any Christians, are not to be charged on Christianity, but on the want of it.

three years and a half in the time of Ahab? Then unite these two evils together at one time. Then, let them not only come in one particular place, but through the whole country. If one part only is in want, and another has abundance, there may be relief afforded; but here the famine is general, from one end of the country to the other. Such is the figure by which the Scriptures represent the want of a preached word; and the want thus typified is manifestly the greater as the soul is more important than the body, and eternity of higher magnitude than the life now present. Isaiah shews that *the bread of adversity and the water of affliction* are far less evils than the removal of teachers from a country. Isa. xxx. 20.

It has been remarked, that "spiritual judgments are the worst, as men are senseless of them, and they are tokens of God's heaviest displeasure; and of them the famine of the word is the most dangerous. Ignorance, blindness, hardness of heart, impenitence, and infidelity, are lamentable plagues; but by the preaching of the word, they may be removed or subdued; but, where vision fails, people must perish; for the absence of the word locks and rivets men into their sins, and the judgments of them."

The history of those on whom this threatening was denounced, illustrates these observations. Look at the Jews since they rejected the word; for nearly two thousand years, how affecting the lesson which their history teaches! Scattered over the earth, they are *now a proverb and a byeword; a nation meted out, and trodden under foot.* They are enveloped in the midst of Talmudical and Rabbinical rites and superstitions. They have, it is true, the Scriptures; but there is a famine of *hearing* the word. They want living preachers, declaring scriptural truth. From the days of the Apostles till now, when God's promised time of mercy to this once-favoured people seems to be arriving, we find not a faithful ministry of God's word among them. They have Jacob's well, but the stone is upon it, unrolled away, so that there is none to draw water for them from the life-giving fountain.

But not to confine our views to one example, let us regard the GENERAL HISTORY of the church and of the world. We have noticed, that spiritual prosperity is greatly connected with hearing; and the important principle on which we are insisting, that those countries flourish most in TEMPORAL PROSPERITY, where the Gospel is most fully preached and heard, may, we apprehend, be fully established by FACTS. To enter into this minutely, would require lengthened discussion; but the general result will be sufficiently obvious from a cursory review of the world.

Look at the kingdoms of the world, as it regards national prosperity; view the Heathen, and the Mahomedan, and Jewish world; view corrupt, decayed, and flourishing Christian churches; and you will find that nations prosper in proportion as the ministry of the word is maintained in purity and vigour. The public and constant preaching of divine truth, brings along with it, as far as it is permitted to have influence, not only right views of God and our relation to him, and pure and spiritual worship of him; but all those things which indicate national prosperity; the true principles of loyalty, freedom, and respect for those in authority, consideration for those in subjection, peace and security of property, liberty of the press, general diffusion of knowledge, progress of arts and science, and general happiness among the whole population, mark such countries. On the other hand, in idolatrous countries, cruelty, impurity, and female degradation, are distinguished features: in Mahomedan countries, pride and lust of dominion, oppression and despotism, and licentiousness prevail: in the decayed Eastern or corrupt Roman Catholic churches, possessing the outward frame of a church, but without the shining light of preaching, you observe silly, and absurd, and childish superstitions, the profanation of the sabbath, great corruptions of morals, despotic governments, and restraints on the freedom of the subject, and the liberty of the press.

A brief sketch of THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH will confirm these views.

Unquestionably, true religion, with social happiness among those under its influence, flourished most in the apostolic age, under the immediate and full instruction of the first teachers of the gospel. Then alone could it be said of the whole church, *They continued stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and prayers, ... all that believed were together, ... they did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people.* It was the determination of the first Christian teachers ;—*We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.* Acts vi. 4.

This happy state of the primitive Church continued (though the light shone with decreasing lustre,) for some centuries. Having already referred to this in the former chapter, and quoted the testimonies of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Athanasius, but little need be added. They sometimes had two or three sermons preached in the same assembly, first by the Presbyters, and then by the Bishop, who usually, when present, closed the service with his paternal exhortation. In many places they preached on two or three of the week-days, and in some they had sermons every day. Augustine says, "The people flock unto the church to the pure solemnities of Christ, where both sexes are so honestly distinguished by their several places ; where they may learn how to lead their temporal lives well here, to become worthy of the eternal hereafter, ... there either the commandments of the true God are propounded, his miracles related, his gifts commended, or his grace implored." *

The Fathers, however, soon found it necessary to urge the work of preaching. Chrysostom, speaking of the duties of Bishops on the words, *apt to teach*, says, "This is most specially required of those who have the office of governing committed to them." He elsewhere says, "St.

* See Augustine's City of God, book ii, ch. 28.

Paul converted the world, not so much by miracles, as by his continual preaching ; and therefore a Bishop must be able to exhort by sound doctrine, that is, to preserve his flock and overthrow its enemies ; and unless he be such a one, all is lost : " and he calls the office of a minister, " the teaching throne." Jerome says, that " a Bishop's innocent conversation without preaching, did as much harm by its silence, as it did good by its example. For the barking of the dogs is as necessary as the shepherd's staff, to terrify and beat off the wolves." *

This neglect of preaching crept into the church by degrees, spread more and more generally, and marked its declining circumstances. Sozomen relates of the Church of Rome in his time, (the fifth century,) that " they had no sermon either by the Bishop or any other, which was contrary to the custom at that time of all churches." †

For some centuries before the Council of Trent was held, preaching was almost wholly laid aside by the clergy. Ancient councils urged this from time to time with little success. Preaching the doctrine of the gospel, and reading the Scriptures at large in the vernacular language, made no part of the public offices of religion. It is true, that it was still the practice to read, or rather chaunt some passages from the Gospels and Epistles in an almost unknown tongue. The mendicants and friars too were a sort of itinerant preachers licensed by the Pope ; but the end of their teaching was not to edify the people, but to collect alms ; so that instead of hearing the doctrine of Christ, the people were amused with novelties and vanities. Matthew of Paris relates a story of the 11th century, the purport of which is to shew that more souls had been sent to hell, through neglect of preaching by the whole ecclesiastical order, in that than in any former age. In the reign of Edward I. as Bishop Stillingfleet observes, " The office of preaching was sunk so low, that, in a Provincial Consti-

* See Bingham's Antiquities, b. 14, c. 4, s. 2.

† See Sozomen, lib. 7, ch. 19. This fact, though questioned, has been rather confirmed than shaken. See Bingham.

tution at that time, great complaint is made of the ignorance and stupidity of the Parochial Clergy, that they rather made the people worse than better. But at that time the Preaching Friars had got that work into their hands by particular privileges, where it is well observed that they did not go to places which most needed their help, but to cities and corporations, where they found most encouragement. But what remedy was found by this Provincial Council? Truly every Parochial Priest four times a year was bound to read an explanation of the Creed, Ten Commandments, the Two Precepts of Charity, the Seven Works of Mercy, the Seven Deadly Sins, the Seven Prinpal Virtues, and the Seven Sacraments.—Here was all they were bound to by these Constitutions." At the Council of Trent a decree was made that Bishops and Parish Priests should preach the Gospel; see Session 5, chap. ii; and since the Reformation it has been more attended to; but Bingham shews that in the dark ages there was a period when the Bishops of Rome were not known to preach for five hundred years together; insomuch that when Pius Quintus made a sermon, it was looked on as a prodigy, and was indeed a greater rarity than the Sæculares Ludi were in old Rome.*

All history declares the barbarism, oppression, ignorance, and low state of morals among the clergy and laity which mark this period. Even Bellarmine (the most acute Defender of Popery) admits, "For some years before the Lutheran and Calvinistic heresies were published, there was not (as contemporary authors testify) any severity in Ecclesiastical Judications, any discipline with regard to morals, any knowledge of sacred literature, any reverence for divine things; there was not almost any religion remaining." See the quotation in Robertson's Charles V.

Indeed, among corrupt and decayed churches, outward shew and pomp, and the administration of the sacraments, is all in all, and preaching is still greatly neglected; and,

* See b. 2, c. 3, s. 4.

except discourses in honour of some favorite saints, or on some great festival, is very much disused. Bernard Gilpin, in a Sermon before the Court of Edward VI. describes at some length the gross superstition and blindness still remaining among the people. He concludes the account—"All this, with much more, cometh through lack of faithful preaching, as experience trieth, where godly Pastors be. It cannot be much marvelled, if the simple and ignorant people, by some wicked heads and firebrands of hell, be sometimes seduced to rebel against their Prince, and lawful magistrates, seeing they are never taught to know their obedience and duty to their king and sovereign, so straightly commanded in God's law." (See Gilpin's Lives of the Reformers.) Bradford truly said of the Roman Mass, "What thing helpeth so much Antichrist's kingdom, as does the mass? and what destroys preaching, and the kingdom of Christ on earth, more than it does?" * Doubtless, since the reformation, in those churches, such as the Gallican, which are less under the injurious dominion of the Pope, a Massilon, a Fenelon, a Bourdaloue, and multitudes of others, have with perhaps unequalled eloquence and great effect, urged many of the truths of Christianity on crowded and admiring congregations. These helped to revive and maintain religion where they laboured, and do not furnish exceptions, but confirmations of our leading principles, that general decay and corruptiou are marked by want of preaching. In the decayed churches of Abyssinia, Ludolph mentions, there are no sermons at all; but only prayers, and reading the Scrip-

* The Rev. D. Wilson thus describes in the present day, the Roman Catholic service at Milan, where that religion having unrestrained influence, we can best judge of its real character. "At half past ten o'clock this morning, we went to the Cathedral.....We saw the whole proceedings at High Mass—priests almost without end; incense, singing, music, processions, perpetual changes of dress; four persons with mitres, whom the people called the little bishops; a crowd of people coming in and going out, and staring around them; but not one prayer, nor one verse of Holy Scripture, intelligible to the people, not even if they knew Latin; not one word of a sermon; in short, it was nothing more, nor less, than a PAGAN SHOW."

He speaks again thus of Namur—"A city almost entirely Roman Catholic! Twenty thousand souls, and scarcely a Protestant family! Not so much as a single sermon that I could hear of in any of the parish churches throughout the day (Sunday) for the people of the town!"—See his Tour on the Continent.

tures. A similar state of things marks the decayed Christian churches in Greece, in Palestine, and in Travancore. The Rev. W. Hartley, when in Corfu in 1825, states, that preaching has unhappily fallen into much disuse among the Greeks; few perform this duty except when appointed by the Archbishop to preach during the season of Lent. The Roman Catholic churches in South America are in a similar state. The Rev. William Jowett, the valuable missionary of the Church Missionary Society, giving an account of his preaching among the Christians in Palestine, says :—" I dwelt briefly on the importance of the right exercise of the Christian ministry, pointing out, that till the work of preaching is reanimated, there is no hope that these countries will be revived and raised from their present degradation, and shewed that this was manifestly the calling and office of the ordained ministers of this country."

Preaching revived with the Reformation, and our principle might be illustrated at much length by historical facts of what then took place, and what has since taken place, as true and scriptural preaching has revived or decayed through the Reformed Churches on the continent, and by the present state of those churches.*

Compare Protestant and Catholic countries, compare Scotland and Ireland, Spain and Holland, Catholic Germany and Protestant Germany, the Romish and the Protestant Cantons of Switzerland, and the result of the contrast in favour of the Protestant religion is obvious; and compare pure Protestantism and corrupt Protestantism, England and Germany, America and Holland, and a similar result is equally obvious. In the four departments of the Rhine, M. Rebmann assures us that the number of malefactors in the Catholic Cantons is as four to one, or even six to one, to that in the Protestant. See Villers, page 272, edition 1820.

In OUR OWN COUNTRY, in the time of Henry VIII. after

* Mr. Rose gives a very affecting view of the sad departure from the truth of many in Germany.—See his State of the Protestant Religion in Germany.

the Bible had been translated and printed, incumbents were directed to instruct the people by teaching them the Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and Ten Commandments in English, and by preaching to them a sermon at least once in a quarter of a year.

One of the first steps of the Reformers, in the reign of Edward VI. was to provide for constant preaching : and as from the general ignorance of the clergy, there were very few competent preachers ; the book of Homilies was prepared to assist in supplying this defect, while the most efficient preachers that could be found, were sent into various parts of the kingdom. The Bishops were also enjoined to give orders to none but such as were able to preach God's word, and would labour in it. The king's council thought frequent and discreet preaching the most effective way to promote good order, quiet, and good obedience.* In this way, pure and scriptural religion was spread, and the foundation laid of that established church, which has so long been a national blessing. Yet "there were so few gospel preachers," Bucer says, "that many churches had no sermons in five or six years or more."

Queen Mary, in the first year of her reign,† in order to suppress the reformation, commanded all her subjects not to presume to preach, or by way of reading in churches, or other public or private places, (except in schools of the universities,) to interpret or teach any Scriptures, or any manner of points of doctrine concerning religion, without special licence. An instructive supplication sent by the Norfolk and Suffolk men to the Queen's Commissioners, asking them, among other things, to render God's word again to the Churches, and to permit its free enjoyment, shews how in the time of greatest trial to the contrary, the principles of the gospel maintain loyalty. One extract only can be quoted, though the whole is worthy of careful perusal. "We profess before God, we think if the holy word of God had not taken some root among us, we

* See Strype's Memorials, Vol. ii, part i, page 262.
† See the inhibition at length in Foxe's Martyrs.

could not in times past, have done that poor duty of ours, which was done in assisting the Queen. It was our bounden duty, and we thank God for the knowledge of his word and grace, that we then did some part of our bounden duty." *

Queen Elizabeth in the beginning of her reign, for political reasons, forbade preaching without a licence, for a short time, but subsequently much was done in her reign to promote the constant preaching of the word. "We send teachers," says Dr. Haddon, "to all the coasts and corners of our country to instruct the people." The Roman Catholics were against this.† They said, "It was never a good world since the word of God came abroad." Still the country was but inadequately supplied. Archbishop Sandys, (see Sermons, p. 213) thus spoke of the need of preachers: "The mother-city of the realm is reasonably furnished with faithful preachers: certain other cities, not many in number, are blessed too, though not in like sort. But the silly people of the land otherwhere, especially in the north parts, pine away and perish, for want of this saving food. Many there are that hear not a sermon in seven years, I might safely say seventeen."‡

Archbishop Grindal, perceiving the ignorance of the clergy, and the great need of more frequent preaching for the instruction of the people, encouraged exercises in preaching in large towns. He was deeply afflicted when the Queen forbade this, and sent her an admirable letter, which is printed in Strype's Life of Grindal. The whole letter is well worthy of attention: the following passages are extracted, as tending to illustrate and confirm the principles on which we are now insisting.—"Public and

* See the Supplication in Fox's Martyrs.

† See Strype's Annals, Vol. i, part i, ch. 13.

‡ Peter Martyr in a letter dated July 1, 1550. "I sorrow unspeakably that there is every where in England so great a penury of the word of God: and since they which are bound to feed the sheep with the doctrine of Christ, are of such faint courage, that they utterly refuse to do their duty. I know not with what tears and weeping it may be sufficiently lamented. But I trust it will come to pass that we shall see things in a better state." See Letters at the end of his Common Places, fo. 1583, p. 115.

continual preaching of God's word, is the ordinary means and instrument of the salvation of mankind. St. Paul calleth it *the ministry of the reconciliation* of man unto God. By preaching of God's word, the glory of God is enlarged, faith is nourished, and charity is increased. By it the ignorant is instructed, the negligent exhorted and incited, the stubborn rebuked, the weak conscience comforted, and to all those that sin of malicious wickedness, the wrath of God is threatened. By preaching also, due obedience to Christian princes and magistrates is planted in the hearts of subjects ; for obedience proceedeth of conscience ; conscience is grounded on the word of God ; the word of God worketh his effect by preaching. So as generally where preaching wanteth, obedience faileth."

The Archbishop illustrates this by facts that had then taken place, as follows. " No Prince ever had more lively experience hereof, than your Majesty hath had in your time, and may have daily. If your Majesty come to the city of London never so often, what gratulation, what joy, what concourse of people is there to be seen ? yea, what acclamations and prayers to God for your long life, and other manifest significations of inward and unfeigned love, joined with most humble and hearty obedience, are there to be heard ? Whereof cometh this, Madam, but of the continual preaching of God's word in that city ? whereby that people hath been plentifully instructed in their duty towards God, and your Majesty ? On the contrary, what bred the rebellion in the North ? Was it not Papistry, and ignorance of God's word through want of often preaching ? And in the time of that rebellion, were not all men of all estates that made profession of the gospel, most ready to offer their lives for your defence ; insomuch that one poor parish in Yorkshire, which by continual preaching had been better instructed than the rest, (Halifax I mean,) was ready to bring three or four thousand able men into the field to serve you against the said rebels ? How can your Majesty have a more lively trial and experience of the contrary effects of much preaching, and of little or no

preaching? The one working most faithful obedience, and the other most unnatural disobedience and rebellion."

He adds the following striking remarks on the difference between preaching and reading the Homilies. "The reading of the Homilies has its commodity, but is nothing comparable to the office of preaching. The godly preacher is termed in Scripture a faithful servant, who knoweth how to give his Lord's family their apportioned feed in season; who can apply his speech to the diversity of times, places, and hearers, which cannot be done in homilies; exhortations, reprehensions, and persuasions, are uttered with more affection to the moving of the hearers in sermons, than in homilies. Besides, homilies were devised by the godly bishops in your brother's time, only to supply necessity for want of preachers; and are by the statute not to be preferred, but to give place to sermons whensoever they may be had."

The Reformers in general felt, as has been pointed out, that loyalty and obedience are maintained by faithful preaching; yet it should be fully allowed that it is only DIVINE TRUTH that is really beneficial. Wherever preaching becomes different to the general spirit and strain of the word of God, either in excessive, deficient, or erroneous exhibition of doctrine or practice, or by lowering divine into human authority and statement, or by extravagant or careless modes of delivery; wherever it becomes political and time-serving, *there*, there is a proportionate failure of success. We might show how abundantly this was exemplified in the reigns of James I. the two Charleses, and in the Commonwealth, and among the Protestant Churches in general.

Civil liberty is equally advanced by scriptural doctrine. When James II. sought to bring in Popery, the clergy began to preach against that *mystery of iniquity* (2 Thess. ii. 7,) and the divine blessing on a general diffusion of scriptural knowledge among all denominations made his attempt impracticable. Indeed the preachers of that era have left in their writings a bulwark against all future

encroachments. The speaker Onslow's remarks on James II. are worthy of observation—"He loved and aimed at absolute power, and believed that nothing could introduce and support it but the Catholic Religion, as the Romanists call theirs; and this increased his zeal for it, and that zeal increased his disposition to arbitrary power: so that, in truth, his religion and politics were partly the cause of each other, and indeed they cannot easily be separated. The Protestant Faith is founded on inquiry and knowledge, the Popish on submission and ignorance. And nothing leads more to slavery in the state than blind obedience in matters of religion; as nothing tends more to civil liberty than that spirit of free inquiry which is the life of Protestantism." (See Burnet's History of his own Times.)

In farther confirmation of these things, we may appeal to the present state of our own country. We would do this with a deep sense of our national sinfulness. Who can but sigh at the abominations of the land in which we dwell, aggravated by our immense spiritual privileges! Who can but sigh at the open profanation of the sabbath in many of our cities and villages; at the many thousand copies of Sunday Newspapers issuing from the press; at avowed infidelity; at the allowance of slavery in our colonies; at the spirit of pride, extravagance, luxury, pomp, and dissipation, among all ranks and classes; at our covetousness, marked in the general and eager pursuit of wealth; at the contempt of authority manifested in our public journals; the spirit of commercial gambling; and the swearing, licentiousness, and profligacy witnessed in our streets! If we are blessed beyond others, it may be well said to us, —*Understand therefore, that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness, for thou art a stiff-necked people.* Deut. ix. 6. The whole history of our country abundantly shows that our present prosperity is not from any superior excellence in Britons beyond others. All who have marked with a Christian eye, how that extended empire which we now enjoy has been bestowed,

will cordially say of the possessors of this empire, *They got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them; but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour unto them.* Psalm xliv. 3.

This we fully admit and assert, and the want of full religious instruction, with the neglect of what we have, will account for it all. Yet we judge of the state of a country in some measure by contrasting it with other countries, and God bestows national benefits in connection with ordinary means; and the preaching of the gospel is, as we have seen, one great means of national prosperity. View then the present state of our country in this connection. How immense our spiritual privileges! Perhaps in no country in the world is the gospel so fully declared as in this, at this day. If we look at the millions of copies of religious publications which are diffused in every part; at the thousands of schools where the Bible is read; at the weekly recurrence of our scriptural liturgy, full of the word of God; and at the tens of thousands of ministers in various ways constantly publicly preaching, and compare this with other countries, we must be convinced that here especially, the word of the Lord has free course. Connect, then, all this general and public diffusion of religious knowledge with the fact, that never, perhaps, was England, on the whole, notwithstanding trials which our sins justly merit, in a state of greater temporal and spiritual prosperity. In no country, perhaps, is real religion more honoured, the tone of morals more high, the spirit of benevolence more extensive, and general integrity of character more maintained. It possesses unparalleled commerce, influence, and dominion, extended almost over the habitable globe; and, wherever it goes, something (though, alas! far too little, and with many drawbacks as it respects men who dishonour their name as Christians) of the ameliorating spirit of its religion, and its laws, and its institutions, is also imparted to the various countries under its sway. We would not undervalue any secondary cause

that may have contributed to this, such as the wisdom of our statesmen, the valour of our armies and fleets, the skill of our artificers, the enterprize of our merchants, and the energy of our character; but all these come from the blessing of God, and under some influence of that religion, proclaimed so freely among us, which elevates man above little, mean, selfish, and personal interests, to those considerations which affect the general good of the whole country. The connection of spiritual and temporal prosperity in England is obvious. At the time when the gospel of Christ is very fully preached at home, and the greatest efforts are made to send it abroad; at this very time our country is blessed with great national happiness and prosperity.* The general diffusion of the spirit of the gospel has carried us safely through many a trying crisis, and has made many a storm only instrumental to our good. Other countries have gone through similar events; but for want of our spiritual privileges, the people had not that moral elevation of character, which would have made them sacrifice pride, ambition, personal aggrandizement, and every selfish and carnal project for the general good. France and Spain have had their storms and revolutions; but they had not the ameliorating spirit of the gospel diffused through the whole community, and they have received little good. It is the gospel, and the gospel alone, accompanied by the efficacy of divine grace, which has made England the envy and admiration of the world; which led us, in the most bitter wars, to the most kindly acts, even

* Occasional distresses and difficulties, which have come upon our country, do not materially affect the general view above given, and suggest important practical lessons. When we look at our national sins; when we remember how much God has been forgotten, and public credit has been idolized; when we remember our extravagant spirit of almost unbounded speculation, and how much the cause and kingdom of Christ havs been disregarded by many among the great men of our country, and by many among our merchants; need we be surprised that God should shew us the emptiness of that in which the world confides, and punish us by the failure of that in which we boasted? O may such distresses shew those who were forgetting him, how entirely they are in his hands, and lead us as a nation to a much higher degree of religion. May all who have power and influence hear the solemn and suitable admonition of the Psalmist—*Be wise now therefore, O ye kings! be instructed, ye judges of the earth! serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way.*

to the enemies with whom we contended ; and which still leads us, wherever we hear of distress, there to feel a brother's sympathy, and to stretch forth the hand of glad and liberal relief. The gospel makes England the Benefactor of the human race, the Storehouse of means and blessings for mankind, and the Missionary of the world.

The same efficacy of the gospel is seen, wherever it is fully proclaimed. In those heathen countries where the missionaries have been able publicly and extensively to preach the word of God in the respective tongues of each nation, there has the divine blessing been abundantly bestowed. We undervalue not other means, especially schools, and the printing-press ; but the preached gospel is the great means, and the great blessing is where that means is in full operation.* We see this in Polynesia, in West Africa, and in the West Indies. In other stations where missionaries have been more recently established, and the languages had to be acquired, and the heathen have not therefore been able to say, *We hear every man in his own tongue, wherein we were born, the wonderful works of God,* there has been comparatively little progress ; so that we may say, ' Tell us how far the word of God is diffused and received, and we will tell you how far true religion with all its beneficial effects succeeds.' The first gift of the Holy Spirit, was to enable the first teachers to speak in other tongues ; and the first use of that gift was to preach the gospel.

We would however fully, again and again, allow and assert that whatever moral and civilizing benefits may

* A Missionary who has laboured for several years among the Heathen, observes, " The kingdom of Satan, I am convinced, will never be shaken to the ground, till Missionaries become preachers of the word; till they place their hope of success on the public preaching of the Gospel, knowing that the word is mighty through God to the pulling down of all the strongest holds of the Devil. Had I a son going forth as a missionary to the heathen, my advice to him should be—'My son, meditate on the word; pray and preach ; shew all kindness to all men for their benefit ; but let nothing divert you from the one work of preaching the Gospel.'" He observes, that education of children, translation of Scriptures, circulation of tracts, &c., are blessed works; but if the missionary engages deeply in them, his heart will be turned from his main office, and though he may occasionally preach, he will cease to view it as the great appointed means of saving sinners.

arise, little or nothing, and in some cases worse than nothing, as it regards spiritual benefit, results from the words of men who occupy the pulpit without declaring, or without feeling themselves, the great truths of Christianity.* It is ONLY the divinely-appointed, the grand and unadulterated, the pure and sublime doctrine of free salvation by a crucified Redeemer, wisely and faithfully preached by men who feel its power, and live under its influence, that is made fully efficacious, through the divine blessing, to the results which have been stated.

History then fully confirms the general principle of this chapter, and the word of God is clear on the subject. Let one passage suffice. *As the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater; so shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn, shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree; and it shall be to the Lord for a name, and for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.* Isa. lv. 10—13.

This subject is of great practical importance. We may learn from it one of the most valuable means of benefiting our fellow-creatures. Here is the moral lever which removes the load that oppresses the world. Here is the secret spring that sets the whole machinery of national

* The Reformers felt the importance of this distinction: Tindal, one of the first translators of the Scriptures into our own language, says, "Where the word of God is presched purely, and received in the heart, there is faith, the Spirit of God, and there are also good works of necessity, wheresoever occasion is given. Where God's word is not purely preached, but men's dresms, traditions, imaginstions, inventions, ceremonies, and superstition, there is no faith, and consequently no spirit that cometh from God; and where God's spirit is not, there can be no good works, even as where an apple-tree is not, there can grow no apples, but there is unbelief, the Devil's spirit, and evil works."—See Fathers of the Church. Vol. i, page 59.

prosperity in regular and beneficial motion. Do we wish to advance our country yet higher in the scale of moral excellence? Do we wish to benefit our sister Island? let us aid every wise plan for promoting the preaching of the gospel; let us throw our whole influence to increase religious instruction, to circulate religious works, to multiply faithful ministers, and to advance the building of churches, and look in fervent prayer to the Lord of the harvest, who invites and commands us to pray to him to send forth labourers. Do we wish to promote the welfare of the whole earth? let us aid, as widely as we can, the diffusion of divine truth. It will be a blessed leaven that will spread itself with a powerful and penetrating, with a pervading and beneficial influence in every land, every city, every village, and every family, till the whole earth be leavened.

But there is a yet higher and more important benefit, not merely affecting us as creatures of a day, or as members of nations, which must all end with this world; but affecting our state through eternity. We will consider this in the following chapter.

CHAPTER III.

PREACHING THE WORD THE SPECIAL ORDINANCE OF GOD FOR THE SALVATION OF HIS PEOPLE, AND THE MANIFESTATION OF THOSE WHO ARE LOST.

THE most important aspect in which we can regard the ministry of the word is, that it is the grand appointed means for the salvation of man. It is valuable as promoting the happiness of nations, and the present welfare of man ; but its highest commendation is, that it is the means which God usually blesses to our salvation. *It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.* 1 Cor. i. 21. This being a point of such immense moment, and very often asserted in the Holy Scriptures, it will be profitable to consider it at some length.

When our Lord first gave the commission *to preach the gospel to every creature*, he added this all-important sanction—*He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved ; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.* Mark xvi. 16. The circumstances in which these words were spoken, are such as greatly to increase their importance. The Lord of life and glory had gone through the scene of his humiliation, and had finished that work of redemption which he came to accomplish. He had overcome the sharpness of death ; he had risen from the grave ; and having thus obtained an eternal salvation for ruined sinners, he appeared for the last time to his followers. His beloved disciples, filled with love, and reverence, and admiration, hung round about him. He led them out to Bethany, and the last

charge which he gave them before he ascended to his original glory, was the commission just mentioned—a commission, important in every point of view ; but especially important as comprising the appointed means for conveying to the human race the vast blessings which the Son of God came into the world to obtain.

The words which our Lord uses in his last commission given to his Apostles, evidently imply that preaching is God's special ordinance for salvation. The Apostles shew this at length in various parts of the Epistles. (See Rom. x ; 1 Cor. i. iii.) St. Paul says, the Gospel of Christ *is the power of God unto salvation unto every one that believeth.* Rom. 1. 16. After the general statement, *Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved,* (Rom. x. 13,) the Apostle proceeds, with a course of questions which fully shew that hearing is the great mean appointed of God for obtaining those graces which are connected with our salvation—*How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed ? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard ? and how shall they hear without a preacher ? and how shall they preach except they be sent ?* See how inseparably he links together salvation, praying, believing, hearing, preaching, and sending. He who says, Believe, that thou mayest be saved, says also, Hear, that thou mayest believe. We have no warrant to expect salvation in any other way. Hearing is then God's appointment ; it is his special ordinance for communicating faith, and all its blessed results. Its effect depends not on the perfection or imperfection, the meanness or dignity, the degree, or gift of grace in the minister. Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, (men doubtless of very different talents and graces,) or the very weakest of the Apostles, preached, they were, after all, but Ministers ; Instruments "by whom," or by whose instrumentality, "men believed ;" their efficiency was in the appointment, their success was in the ordinance, as instituted and ordained by God for the special purpose of conveying grace to the hearer. Preaching, as a constituted means of grace, can alone prosper :

the benefit depends not on the minister, but on God's blessing on the means, and on that faith in the hearer which applies the word in power ; for the word preached did not profit, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. One reason, probably, that the sermons of the most accomplished ministers produce so little comparative effect is, because men expect more from the minister, than from the power of God's Spirit, blessing the ordinance as a means of grace to their souls.

It is not however every sort of preaching, but preaching the Gospel, *the Gospel of peace—glad tidings of good things,* (Rom. x. 15.)—*Christ crucified—Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption,* (1 Cor. i. 23, 30,) that is the means appointed for conveying to man the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the graces and blessings of the Christian dispensation.

We will first state the distinguishing feature of that preaching which God blesses ; and then shew that a rejection of it leaves men undone, and a reception of it is inseparably connected with salvation.

It is evident from various passages of Holy Scripture, that the great subject of the ministry of the Apostles was Christ crucified for our sins. They speak of this as the prominent subject and characteristic feature of their ministry. *I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.* 1 Cor. ii. 2. *I delivered unto you,* FIRST OF ALL, *that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins.* 1 Cor. xv. 3. *They* CEASED NOT *to teach and preach Jesus Christ.* Acts v. 42. *Paul,* AS HIS MANNER WAS, *went in unto them, and three sabbath-days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered and risen again from the dead.* Acts xvii. 2, 3. He counted it his great office as well as honour, *to preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.* Eph. iii. 8.

No preaching then is Apostolic, in which Christ Jesus—his cross and his resurrection—his grace and his glory, are not prominent. The doctrines which the Apostles preached,

are called *the preaching of the cross;* (1 Cor. i. 18.) the doctrine of a crucified Saviour, his death on the cross for the sins of the world. O that this ever were, O that this may ever be, the grand and distinguishing feature of the discourses of all that minister in holy things. Nothing else is the scriptural way of preaching—nothing else is blessed of God.

The Apostles preached *Christ crucified as* THE LEADING TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY. The atonement for sin made by his death was their glory. *God forbid,* says St. Paul, *that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Gal. vi. 14. It is evidently that remarkable and astonishing fact which eminently distinguishes Christianity from all other systems of religion whatsoever.

Look at the character and glory of Him who died. It is not merely man, nor an angel of light, nor a creature even of the highest excellence. It is the Creator of every creature—the Lord from heaven—the Son of God. He is *over all, God blessed for ever.* He *in the beginning was with God, and was God.* He is called *the great, the mighty, the true God; Jehovah; by whom all things were made, and without whom was not any thing made that was made.*

This glorious God *was manifested in the flesh.* God sent *his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin.* Rom. viii. *He, who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God—made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.* Phil. ii. 7, 8. He became a little child, was subject to his parents, lived many years in the world, laboured at his reputed father's business, and appeared as a *man of sorrows.* The Lord of all worlds so humbled himself, that on earth, *he had not where to lay his head;* and He, a patient sufferer, was opposed, persecuted, mocked, ridiculed, and spit upon, by his own creatures. He underwent the extremest agony of body and soul. He sweat great drops of blood in that suffering. He was tried, con-

demned, and crucified, by his own people, even those whom he came to save.

These are facts declared in the Bible ; and surely, such facts are the most astonishing and stupendous that the mind of man can possibly contemplate. They are the more deeply impressive to us, as we have the most intense interest in them. We are assured that *he bore our sins in his own body on the tree ;* and that *we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.* What truths then can possibly be of greater moment to sinful creatures ? Without this hope, we might lie down in despair under the burden of sin, guilt, and misery ; and the dread of eternal wrath from a justly-offended Creator.

We are also assured, that through death, Christ, our Lord, overcame Satan, our chief adversary, and vanquished every other spiritual enemy. He made the conquest at the very time that he seemed conquered. And now he lives for evermore the Saviour of sinners. He thus describes himself,— *I am he that liveth, and was dead ; and, behold, I am alive for evermore ! Amen ; and have the keys of hell and of death.* Rev. i. 18. He rose from the grave a triumphant conqueror, and is now seated at the right hand of God, the Redeemer, Deliverer, and Intercessor of his people, even of all them that trust in him.

Such is the doctrine of a crucified Redeemer. It is the centre of all other truths. They all flow from this, they all cling to this, and hang round this ; it is the support, and stay, and illustration of every other revealed truth. Hence we may observe, that whatever OTHER DOCTRINES the Apostles preached, THEY TAUGHT them IN DIRECT CONNECTION WITH THIS leading truth ; and on whatever duties they insisted, it is from this they lead us to discharge them. Do they declare the love of God ? it is from this topic it derives its brightest evidence—*Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.* Do they exhibit his justice ? this *propitiation* is *set forth* to shew that *God is just, and the justifier of him which believeth in*

Jesus, Do they urge dedication to God? here is its main spring; *ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and your spirit which are his.* Do they seek to comfort Christians? they tell us, *in that Christ himself suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them also that are tempted; he is touched with a feeling of our infirmities.* Do they endeavour to alarm and awaken the careless? it is by this appeal, *How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation!* Are we taught to be humble, and to give place to others? here is the motive—*Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant, even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and give his life a ransom for many.* Are we instructed how to discharge relative duties? it is still from the same doctrine—*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the Church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it.*

These instances will sufficiently shew that the doctrine of the death of Christ for sin, is the leading truth of Christianity; that which is specially insisted on by its first teachers; and that which is eminently the ordinance of God for the salvation of men. It was not the preaching *with enticing words of man's wisdom*, that was accompanied by the Holy Spirit; but the preaching of *Jesus Christ and him crucified*, came to the Corinthian converts *in demonstration of the Spirit, and of power*, so that their faith stood *in the power of God*. 1 Cor. ii. 4, 5. The gospel is eminently the ministration of the Spirit. 2 Cor. iii. 8. When the love of God, our heavenly Father, as especially manifested in the atonement of Christ, and the work of his Spirit, is held forth prominently; when free justification by divine grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and sanctification by his Spirit are clearly and explicitly displayed; then God gives testimony to the word of his grace in the conversion and edification of sinners; then he pours out his Holy Spirit, and revives and refreshes his church.

You have here, then, Christian Reader, a test of that which is the true Gospel of Christ. Wherever Christ is

not exhibited as the principal subject of the sermon, or other truths are preached without any connection with this leading truth, there, there is not the pure light of Christianity. O then, pray for your ministers, that they may know more of Christ themselves, and preach him more simply, and fully, as the only hope of fallen man. While his redemption exhibits the brightest displays of God's perfections, and the most quickening motives to obedience, it is the very doctrine by which it pleases God to save precious and immortal souls.

Perhaps some ministers may have laboured diligently and conscientiously according to their knowledge for many years, and have seen little fruit of their labours in turning sinners from the error of their ways; in such a case, it becomes them seriously to inquire, whether they have fully exhibited a crucified Saviour, as the only and sovereign remedy for our spiritual maladies, and the only medium of return to God. This of itself is a sufficient cause of their failure. The remarks of two venerable and beloved Christians who adorned the gospel in a leading situation for fifty years, are very worthy of deep consideration. "We have often found in the case of relatives and friends, whose religious views did not accord with ours, and who have been present as fellow-hearers; that sermons peculiarly evangelical, containing truths apparently uninteresting to them, or rather likely to excite prejudice and disgust, have been well received and even commended, while those on popular subjects, such as the care of the soul, the almost Christian, the realities of death and judgment, &c. which we hoped would have made a strong impression, seemed to have made none at all. So it pleased God in his sovereign wisdom to order things! no doubt to convince us that in every sense of the word, *Salvation belongeth unto him.*" Besides this cause of failure, neglect of fervent prayer for our congregations, may equally hinder our ministerial success. Jer. x. 21; Phil. i. 3, 4.

This doctrine is effective of the most important results. It has two very important, but very different and opposite

effects. *The preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but unto us which are saved, it is the power of God.* Those who are lost, reject it as folly. Those who are saved, receive it as the power of God.

A rejection of the Gospel LEAVES MEN UNDONE. *If our Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost.* They reject the gratuitous pardon, and the free salvation which the Sovereign of all worlds sets before them. Through their wilful blindness, and sinful perverseness, they see not any wisdom or excellence in salvation by a crucified Redeemer. It may be very profitable to consider some of the grounds on which different characters reject the great appointed means of salvation, so that it becomes to them, not a *savour of life unto life*, but *of death unto death.* There are THE WISE and LEARNED of this world, like the philosophers of old; who, because they know arts and sciences better than others, or are acquainted with learned languages, and understand rules of criticism, instead of using these talents, as they might be used, for the better understanding of the truth, are puffed up with pride, and a conceit of their own superior wisdom; will not comprehend the doctrine of the cross, and disdain to come with others as poor perishing sinners, guilty, condemned, and undone, for a free salvation. This doctrine was *foolishness to the Greek* formerly, and it is, alas! too evident, that it is still foolishness to many who have genius, and talent, and learning, and every thing, but a heart subjected to the mind and will of God. Therefore God leaves them to their own wisdom, and they cannot find that way of life, which a wayfaring man, though a fool, does not mistake. O let us pray to be delivered from the pride of fancied knowledge, and ask for the simplicity of a little child, in receiving the doctrines of the Gospel. Not that true philosophy and science are to be despised; they render service to religion, when under its governing influence; but the grace of God alone prepares the heart for its reception. The philosophers of old were not the first to receive the Gospel; and when they did receive it, they soon sought to deteriorate it by human

mixtures ; and philosophers in the present day have often acted a similar part : *If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise.* 1 Cor. iii. 18. That wisdom of God which philosophers have rejected, multitudes of the poor and ignorant have gladly received, and have become wise unto salvation. The SELF-RIGHTEOUS count this foolishness, as the Pharisees of old did. These will not part with their fancied worthiness. They trust in their regular, moral, decent, and sober life. Such a life is praiseworthy before men, and no man can be in the way to heaven, who does not thus live ; but a man may so live, and yet through pride of heart, be farther from God than those living in open sin. Matt. xxi. 31. Nothing is more contrary to their state of mind, than to be called on to renounce all hope in any goodness or merit of their own, and to descend to a level with the vilest sinner, as to justification before God, and build every hope on free and unmerited grace through a crucified Lord. Hence they exclaim against it, as opening the flood-gates of sin, and count nothing too severe to say against those who maintain this doctrine. The LOVER OF THE WORLD thinks the doctrine of the cross to be foolishness. That doctrine proclaims the immense value of spiritual things, and the vanity of all worldly things. While it shews that the favour of God is better than life itself, it at the same time declares that *the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, shall pass away.* Hence it disturbs him in the pursuit of his worldly plans. It is incompatible with his favourite objects. He cannot, if he receives it, follow his covetous desires, his proud inclinations, or his vain pleasures ; but must yield himself to the service of God, as the one thing of supreme importance. The ANTINOMIAN, too, though he may boast of his regard to the cross, and despise others, and think that it will allow him to live as he pleases, and gratify his sinful appetites ; yet, after all, the true doctrine of the cross is foolishness to him also. He discerns not, or dislikes its practical tendency. He shrinks from the real cross. He

marks not the corresponding obligations to take up our cross, deny ourselves, and follow Christ. He cannot really enter into the force of the Apostle's words, *I am crucified with Christ.*

Thus in various and opposite ways, men, from the love of sin, forming a wrong estimate of the gospel, reject the only way of salvation, and refuse to submit to Almighty God. May every reader examine his own heart, and compare his present state with that described in the word of God: and in doing so, may the blessed Spirit discover to each of us our real character, and lead us to a true, a cordial, and an entire reception of the Gospel. It is not a small matter, or a trifling evil, to count such a salvation folly. It is attended with a most awful and tremendous ruin. They that count it foolishness, *perish.*

God seems to have made this method of salvation the means of more strikingly manifesting the characters of ungodly men, as well as of conveying his grace to his people. He calls here for the unqualified submission of our understanding and our affections to his revealed will. Those who love their sins, those who are covetous, proud, sensual, and ambitious, and will not see the evil of their course, nor part with their iniquities, presumptuously arraign *the wisdom of God*, and perish for ever. They remain in that original ruin from which the Gospel reveals the only way of escape. Refusing that way, the sentence of condemnation remains unrepealed. *He that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.* But they perish also with an aggravated ruin—*Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God—It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* If the Gospel does not save, it condemns to greater ruin.

O what a ruin is this! Who can consider it aright, without being ready to weep day and night for such souls as might escape it and will not! To be lost, and that for ever! What words can describe the unutterable woe!

All peace and all joy, all goodness and all happiness, lost, for ever lost! The society of the Redeemed, the company of Angels, the presence and knowledge of him who is the source of all blessedness—the benignant Father of mercies and God of all comfort, the gracious Saviour, the full Comforter of his people: these, with all the bliss and glory of heaven's eternal mansions, lost, for ever lost! Then, in the place of these, the fire that never can be quenched, the worm that never dies, perpetual wickedness, incessant disquietude, the torturing and never-ceasing anguish of guilt, the perpetual presence of accursed fiends, this inexpressible and exhaustless misery to be endured, even for ever! O rejecter of that Gospel, whoever you be, surely our hearts are hard, and our faith is weak, and we have not the due feelings of human sympathy, or rivers of tears would ever be running down our eyes for you: like David, we should be horribly afraid for you; like all the Prophets, like the holy Apostles, like the beloved Son of God, we should constantly be warning you, we should, with all possible earnestness, exhort you, we should tenderly and affectionately beseech you, to *flee from the wrath to come!*

There will be this galling and torturing reflection, added to the other agonies of perdition—a way of escape was provided, was proclaimed, and was proposed to them; but they counted that very way in which the wisdom of God is most wonderfully displayed to the highest intelligences and the brightest seraphs above—they counted it, (O sad effect of the madness of the fallen heart, and the inexpressible delusion of Satan putting darkness for light, and light for darkness, calling good evil, and evil good)—they counted it foolishness! they even, trusting in their own lie, spurned it from them with the utmost contempt, proudly preferred their own vain imaginations, and chose their own device, leading them to eternal destruction. Oh! does any reader of these lines now mock and despise the humble believer, and count his life madness? let him pause, and consider the Bible account of the end of such a course. It may be, it must be, it is, true. Are you then

desirous of aggravating your own woe? Are you willing to be miserable for ever for the sake of a little fancied temporal advantage? The word of God cannot deceive you; his book makes it palpably plain that they who hear not the words of Christ shall perish for ever. They shall remain a lasting spectacle to the world, to angels, and men; a monument to all God's creatures, of the stupendous and unutterable folly of departing from God, and of his strict and perfect, his eternal and awful truth and justice. Is it possible that one who reads these pages may endure that wrath of which they bring testimony from God's holy word? O may the writer and every reader diligently look that they fail not of the grace of God, and that they be not at the last numbered among the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction! If you have trifled hitherto, trifle no longer. Read your Bible with fervent prayer, earnestly imploring the influences of the Holy Spirit; and thus acting, never shall you be left to count the Gospel foolishness, and so to perish for ever.

If I have dwelt longer on this than the subject of the chapter required, let the inconceivable importance be a sufficient apology.

But, blessed be God, there is another far different and an infinitely happy effect produced by the Gospel. It is THAT system of DOCTRINE WHICH GOD BLESSES to the SALVATION of those that hear and receive it.

To avoid some mistakes, it may be necessary to shew more particularly how hearing aright promotes our eternal salvation. It does not save our souls by any merit of man's in so hearing. It is rather our mercy and privilege that we hear the faithful preaching of his Gospel, and that he gives us suitable dispositions. Nor is there any necessary connection between using the means of grace and obtaining the glory of God; there is a gracious but not a necessary connection; for many have the outward means, who never obtain the ultimate blessing which those means are designed to impart.

Hearing the word aright then, is one of those means

appointed by a heavenly Father, in infinite mercy, in the due use of which he will communicate to us the gifts of wisdom, faith, repentance, and all those graces which mark a saved state here, and prepare us for eternal bliss hereafter. A faithful ministry clearly reveals the way of salvation, and brings it plainly before us, and God makes it a saving blessing to his people, as St. Paul shews :—*The righteousness which is of faith*, saith, *The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart, that is, the word of faith which we preach, that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.* He then asks, *How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard ?*

This happy effect of hearing begins in, and is marked by, quite an opposite estimate of the Gospel to that which we have already considered. What the men of this world regard as an unintelligible doctrine, as folly and absurdity, is to the humble Christian an exhibition of the stupendous power and unsearchable wisdom of Almighty God. The creation of the world displayed his wisdom and power ; but the redemption and recovery of a ruined world—the restoration of offending creatures—the pardon of guilty rebels by the Holy God, and their obtaining the favour of a Just, Righteous, and Eternal Being—here was a work to which nothing was equal but infinite wisdom and almighty power ! The change made in a corrupt and polluted heart, the daily victory over sin and Satan, the coming out and being separate from a world lying in wickedness, the final overthrow of all the powers of darkness, death, and hell, for this nothing is effective but the Gospel, by which, through his Spirit, God works in us and strengthens us. It is by this channel that the Holy Spirit, the fountain of spiritual life, and the earnest of future glory, is, though not necessarily and invariably, yet most generally conveyed to man. Thus it is specially the ordinance of God for our salvation.

The effects of the Gospel manifest that it is indeed the power of God. View Saul breathing out threatenings and

slaughters against the disciples of the Lord, riding to Damascus in all the rage of a cruel persecutor. He hears the voice of the Gospel, *I am Jesus whom thou persecutest!* at once the tempest is stilled; the lion becomes a lamb; he asks, *What wilt thou have me to do?* View the jailor at Philippi, after Paul and Silas had received many stripes, cruelly neglecting their wounds, thrusting them into the inner prison, and making their feet fast in the stocks. No sooner does he hear the voice of the Gospel, than, the same hour of the night, he takes them, washes their stripes, brings them into his house, sets meat before them, and rejoices, believing, with all his house. The personal experience of every Christian gives him individual proof of the same power. Those who have felt their imminent danger through sin, and that they have been on the very brink of a never-ending ruin, and could not save themselves, will readily acknowledge the wonders of that wisdom and power which provided a way of escape. Those who were covetous, sensual, proud, earthly-minded, and those who have gone still farther in iniquity, and were perhaps once drunkards, swearers, sabbath-breakers, or fornicators; such, when converted, and made new creatures in Christ Jesus, can, from their own experience, testify that the Gospel is the power of God.

And wherever such a change is effected, there is salvation begun—there is a blessed token and pledge of future glory. If, Christian Reader, you are trusting only in a crucified Saviour; if you see the excellence and blessedness of his Gospel; if you have felt its efficacy in turning you from your sins, you have in these things cheering and delightful evidences that the Gospel has been to you an ordinance for your salvation; that you are among the saved; that you were chosen in Christ; that you are born of God, sanctified by his Spirit, upheld by his power, and that you shall be brought to his glory.

And who can fully declare the value of this salvation? Even in this life, to have a relief from the guilt and burden of sin; to have sufficient strength afforded us against the

power of the enemy; to have the spirit of adoption and the hope of glory, may well gladden the heart in the midst of the greatest temporal sorrows. But eternity, though it will more fully discover the value of this salvation, will never exhaust it. O Christian reader! to be among the saved at last; to lie in Abraham's bosom; to associate ever with the spirits of just men made perfect; to be free from all sin, and free to all holiness; to be without any curse, pain, or sorrow; and to be so filled with every blessing as to have, in the expressive language of Scripture, *fulness of joy;* to see Jesus and be ever with him; to behold God as he is, and know as we are known; boundless, unutterable, ever-enduring, and unalloyed bliss: this is the salvation which God has connected with the faithful hearing and due reception of Christ's word! O Christian Reader! that you and the writer may thus be blessed! Is it not a delightful thought that there are those now living on earth who shall in heavenly glory sing the song, *Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever!* Let us, above all things, seek to be numbered with them; let us pray with David, *Remember me, O Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people.*

The practical improvement of this doctrine is obvious and important. The effect which the Gospel has upon you should be A MEANS OF DISCOVERING TO YOU YOUR OWN CHARACTER. In a world like this, where our own hearts are very deceitful, where Satan strives to blind us, and all around is calculated to mislead us, it is of the greatest moment to us to have our real character laid open and shewn to us. Now we have, in the way in which we view the Gospel, a test and touchstone of divine nature, by which we may ascertain our state—*We preach Christ crucified; unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, the power of God and the wisdom of God.* Let us then enquire, most seriously and most anxiously, as a matter that

concerns our eternal welfare, in what way we view the Gospel: if it be a stumbling-block, or foolishness, we are among the lost. If we receive it, on the other hand, as the wisdom of God, and his power has been manifested towards us through it in changing and renewing us, this may give us an assured hope that our character is that of a real disciple of Christ. Let us try and search hereby whose we are and what we are.

We may also learn NOT TO JUDGE OF THE GOSPEL BY THE OPINION OF WORLDLY MEN. True it is that they may be very wise in the things of this world; replenished with literature, genius, and talents; acute, sensible, and shrewd in worldly things; and with all this they may count the gospel plan of salvation foolishness. But let this guard us against so great a snare; the Bible says it is foolishness to them that perish. Will you abide by the opinion of those who shall in the great day of judgment be condemned of God, and perish for ever? O no! you can have no wish to follow them to eternal ruin. Let this consideration break the snare which the false judgment of man may spread around you. Who would, with an intelligent mind, in the very face of Scripture, despise the Gospel, at the price of eternal ruin, because it may be lightly thought of by any human being? Christian reader! the more the wise of this world despise, ridicule, and oppose the Gospel, the dearer let it be to your heart, and the more boldly do you confess it before men.

Never be content till you EXPERIENCE THE SAVING POWER OF THE GOSPEL. As, if you slight and despise the Gospel, you may here see written as with a sunbeam, your imminent danger, and discover your final doom in words so obvious that they cannot be mistaken; so you may, on the other, discover the appointed method of salvation. Are preaching, hearing, faith, prayer, and salvation, graciously linked together as means and result; (Rom. x. 13—15.) as God's plan for bringing his sons to glory? value then the words of salvation; let the doctrine of the cross be very precious in your estimation. Meditate

on these things. Is hearing the great mean appointed of God for recovering our souls from that state of spiritual death and ruin, that alienation and separation from God, in which we are lying by nature, and restoring us to life and favour and communion with God ? we should use this means for this end. Are you unconverted ? come, looking that the very next sermon may be God's opportunity for your conversion. Are you cold, and lukewarm ? attend on his preached word that you may be warmed and enlivened. Are you in a worldly state of mind ? go to hear, that your affections may be set on heavenly things. Are you strong in the Lord ? still go for that which you still need, the increase of faith, hope, and love. Expect much in the way of God's institution, and you shall not be disappointed. We look too much at the circumstances, and too little at the practical end of the ministry. Let our end and main business be spiritual profit, and to be nourished unto eternal life. Pray for the gift of the Holy Ghost, and so shall the preached Gospel become powerful and efficacious to produce in you faith, and final salvation. And, lest any should be too much discouraged by a fear that because they have hitherto slighted the word, they are already lost, we would add the encouraging remark, that often where the word has been little attended to at first, (as at Corinth, Acts xviii.) it has been subsequently gladly received. Bishop Jewell says, "God knoweth whom he will bring to be of his fold, and make to hear his voice. Many times he blesseth his word with great increase among them, which at the first despise it, and entreat cruelly the preachers and messengers thereof." But when the word has not been efficacious, take care that you do not blame God, or his word, or his ordinances, but your own unbelief, (Heb. iv. 2,) and want of upright walking. Micah ii. 7.

Let us be GRATEFUL TO GOD, IF WE HAVE FOUND THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST THE POWER OF GOD TO OUR SALVATION. O how should our hearts be impressed with a sense of His benefits, to Whom we owe all, and who has bought

us at the price of the blood of his dear Son! how should we value that means which he has appointed for conveying his blessings! Let us embrace it more simply and more fully, and adorn it more wholly.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST THE GLORY OF CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLIES.

It was a remarkable appeal that Solomon made in his affecting prayer at the dedication of the temple—*Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less the house that I have builded!* 1 Kings viii. 27. This was an instance of divine condescension and favour that could not be sufficiently admired and celebrated. The same condescending goodness is manifested in Christian assemblies. To them the presence of the Lord God, our Saviour, is promised, and we may ask with admiration, 'Does he who is the Lord of Glory, the Creator of all things, the Redeemer of all men, still dwell on the earth?' Behold, *all power is given unto him in heaven and earth!* will he then be present when his people meet together? He will be; and he will manifest himself in his appointed assemblies.

When he gave his commission to his disciples to preach the Gospel, he at the same time gave them the encouraging assurance—*Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the world.* Wherever his Gospel is preached, and his servants are gathered together to hear that Gospel, there he will always be among them, through all ages, to the end of time, manifesting his presence, and pouring out his blessing. Agreeing with this assurance is the gracious promise—*Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.* It is a merciful part of this last

promise that the object is not specified or limited. It is graciously left open. Like many other large and bountiful promises of the word of God, there is no limitation of any specific object. Whether it be for Prayer, or Hearing the Word, or for Baptism, or the Lord's Supper, for Christian Intercourse, Family Worship, or promoting a Charitable Institution ; whatever be the particular religious purpose in assembling together, only let the meeting be in the name of Jesus, and it is an assembly to which he vouchsafes his presence.

There is indeed a limitation with regard to the number assembling ; but that very limitation only heightens the divine mercy, for it is all in favour of his people. The lowest possible number that can form a company is that which our Lord specifies as what he will bless with his presence. O how infinite the wisdom, and how vast the kindness of giving the promise even to so small a number as two or three, and not excluding, but rather increasing and enlarging the blessing, according to the number and piety of faithful worshippers ! In the primitive ages, when Christians were violently persecuted, often they were not able to meet in larger companies than two or three ; but this is a number which is easily procured, even in a barren and afflicted state of the Church. Often iniquitous laws have been passed against Christians meeting together ; but human laws could not exclude them from the benefit of this promise.

Nor is this a blessing of small moment, as we shall see in more particularly noticing what is the peculiar nature of the presence of Christ in such assemblies.

It is not merely a presence in thought and purpose, in wish and intention, or by virtue of authority, like the Apostle who told the Corinthians, (1 Cor. v. 3,) *I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already as though I were present.* The Saviour is truly with his people, and, though unseen, really presides over them : *Head over all things to the church, which is his body.*

Neither is the presence of Christ of which we are speak-

ing, merely that omnipresence by which, as God, he is in every place. This is indeed included, and thus the promise becomes a very plain testimony to the divinity of Christ. For as there are thousands and tens of thousands of meetings of his people in social, and family, and public acts of religion, at the same time, and in different parts of the world, it is impossible that he could be in the midst of each, who is not every where present, *God over all, blessed for ever.* It is observable, also, that when our Saviour promised to be in the midst of his people, he did not follow the natural and obvious mode of expression, "there I will be," but, "*there I am;*" as if to denote more expressly his Divine Nature; just as he told the Jews, *before Abraham was, I am.* Thus he assumed that divine title by which God made himself known to the Israelites—*I am that I am; and he said, Thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.*

What a cheering truth is this of the divine character and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ! Our mild and beneficent, our compassionate and gracious Saviour, is one with the Father; *He is the King of Glory*—the Lord of heaven and earth—the Most High God—everywhere present. As the sun shines in the firmament, warming, enlivening, cherishing, and blessing every land; so Christ Jesus is *the Light of the World.* He is confined to no country, colour, or tongue. He shines, too, in places into which the rays of the natural sun never penetrate, nor can any thing exclude his presence and glory from the hearts of his people.

By the presence of Christ promised to Christian assemblies, is meant, more than that general presence by which he is with and in every part of the world. It is a real, a manifested, and a beneficial presence, through the power of His Holy Spirit.

It is a REAL presence. Though our Lord Christ be invisible to our bodily sight, still he is truly present; he is actually among his people, though they see him only by the eye of faith: the expression, *There am I in the midst*

of them, sufficiently declares this. In another place he also thus describes the same truth, (Rev. ii. 1.) *These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks.* How solemn and affecting, how reviving and delightful is the thought, that Jesus Christ walks in the midst of Christian assemblies! He, in the emphatic language of Scripture, *inhabits the praises* of his people. His eye observes every individual. He notices every mind, and discerns every heart. Unseen, he governs the whole assembly.

It is also a MANIFESTED presence; a presence that his people know and enjoy. He assured the Apostles that he would *manifest himself* to them. John xiv. 21. When his people are assembled together he meets them; while they hear his word, credit his promises, and rely on his grace, he gives them his Spirit, he lifts up the light of his countenance upon them, and fills them with peace. He that has experienced this, understands it in a way that it is impossible to make equally intelligible to a mind filled with the world, and vanity, and sin. The Christian knows that he has often found the presence of Christ *in the midst of the congregation:* he has there had realizing views of his Being, his nearness, and his goodness, and has enjoyed sensible communion with him. In drawing *nigh to God*, he has found the truth of the promise—*he will draw nigh to you.* James iv. 8. It is this that fills Christian assemblies with a cloud of greater glory than filled the house of God when Solomon dedicated the Temple. Without the manifested presence of Christ, public preaching is but a cold and heartless service. One reason why assembling together to hear the word of Christ is so dull and tedious to most is, they think not of, and desire not, and expect not, the presence of the great King, and they therefore experience not its true blessedness. The greatest multitude of worshippers, and the most splendid edifice, and the sweetest melodies, are mean and wretched, empty and unsatisfying, to the Christian's mind, if Christ be not there. The most humble and the very poorest assembly of real

Christians, wherever they meet, has a glory that far excels any mere grandeur of edifice, largeness of company, splendour of rank, and external pomp of worship. This is the view with which the servants of God have from the beginning associated together. This presence it was that David so earnestly desired—*O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee : my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee, in a dry and thirsty land where no water is; to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary.* Ps. lxiii. 1, 2. If the writer may judge of others from himself, he would say, the faith of Christians is far too low on this subject, and that therefore we experience far less of this blessing than we otherwise should. O did Christians really feel and enjoy the presence of Christ while hearing his word, how would his house be crowded and overflow with devout, and teachable, and humble worshippers! The dignity and honour, the joy and happiness, of meeting so glorious a Being, would be a sufficient motive to make us constantly frequent the place where we could find him. Christian reader! fix your heart on this blessing when you assemble with your fellow Christians to hear the word of Christ. It has been well observed, that "the heart of a Christian affected with the love of Christ, is like a needle touched with the loadstone, ever tending to one point. It can no longer be quiet, no longer satisfied, at a distance from him. It is put into a continual motion towards him. The motion is indeed weak and tremulous. Panting, breathing, and sighing after him in prayer and meditation are the life of it. But it leads us to leave all for him, and is continually pressing to him as its only centre and rest in this world.

He feels a love by love inspir'd,
Returning whence it came!
That can surrender all for ONE
Who left so much for him.

Need we add farther, that this is a most BENEFICIAL presence? Our Lord, in promising to be with his people, manifestly designed to encourage and comfort them with the assurance of an important benefit. So the Lord pro-

mised Israel, *In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and will bless thee.* Exod. xx. 24. Indeed, as it regards careless, worldly, and perverse attendants on his word, who wilfully reject his truth, his being among his people brings no blessing to them. They should rather consider that he *hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire:* (Rev. ii. 18.) he searches their hearts, and they, continuing to reject him, shall ultimately fall under his just and tremendous displeasure. But to his humble followers, mourning for sin, depressed by their guilt, desiring to trust in him, and longing to serve him, his presence is pregnant with the richest blessings. When he says *I am there,* it is as if he said, The very fountain-head of all truth and wisdom, all power and holiness, all mercy and loving-kindness is there. Where Christ is, there is the full, and inexhaustible, and overflowing spring of all spiritual blessing, all present and eternal good and happiness. Where Christ is, there is the propitiation for our sins, there is the throne of grace, there is God our portion, and our happiness for ever.

Look at the relations which he sustains toward us. He is our PROPHET. The minister teaches, but Christ only brings what is taught, home with power to the heart. Christ alone makes it efficacious. In vain the words sound in our ears, if the Divine Prophet of the Church do not apply them to the heart, and by the gracious influences of his Spirit enable us to hear and understand, receive and obey them: but Jesus Christ is with his people, ready to teach them. He is our PRIEST. The minister is but an ambassador: his object is to direct you to go to the great Mediator, the Lord Christ: only that blessed High Priest *bears the iniquity of our holy things,* atones for our guilt, and intercedes in our behalf. How little do we think of this gracious office, though the greater part of a long epistle, that to the Hebrews, dwells so much upon it! Hence it is we are so little benefited, and have so little enjoyment while in the house of God. Our minds are more on the minister than the Master; and so we lose sight of

the merciful and faithful *High Priest of our profession.* While the minister is preaching, let your heart be led to Jesus, as the only channel by which spiritual blessings are to come. He is our KING, the King of the whole earth, that King who alone can change the mind, renew the soul, subdue Satan, and give spiritual strength to the souls of men. He will, *he must reign till he has put all enemies under his feet.* Fear not, then, to follow his directions ; fear not ; for in serving him you will be safe and protected from every foe ; doubt not his power and sufficiency to fulfil all that his ministers, in his name, promise to his obedient subjects.

It is especially BY HIS SPIRIT that CHRIST MANIFESTS HIS PRESENCE. When he comforted his disciples with the assurance, *I will come to you*, he explained his meaning, by showing that the Father would send the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, in his name, who would come and abide with them for ever. See John xiv. 16, 18, 26. The ordinances of the Gospel are peculiarly the institutions of Christ, ordained by himself as a mean and pledge of enjoying his presence, grace, and love. We may say of them, *My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the bed of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.* Sol. Song, vi. 2. There we receive the communications of his Spirit ; (Gal. iii. 2.) and to them we should go, having Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith, and expecting to enjoy communion with him in the larger and fuller gift of his Holy Spirit. How blessed would the Church be if every believer brought Christ with him, and could, in the ardent language of faith and experience, say, *I found Him whom my soul loveth : I held him, and would not let him go, till I had brought him into my mother's house.* Sol. Song, iii. 4. The Spouse was not content till she had brought him into the Church.

Christ, then, in all his fulness and blessedness, with all his unsearchable riches, is to be found on earth, is to be found among his people. *In Judah is God known; his name is great in Israel. In Salem also is his tabernacle, and*

his dwelling-place in Zion. Ps. lxxvi. 1, 2. What a motive is here to assemble together! Be assured, the beauty, the glory, and the benefit of all Christian assemblies is closely connected with realizing views of the direct presence and blessing of our Lord and Saviour.

Do you enquire, How MAY I ENJOY THIS BLESSING? O that we really believed that it could be obtained, and were earnestly desiring it? Bishop Beveridge says, "If our blessed Saviour were now upon earth, what flocking would there be from all parts to see him; and if he was but in any part of this kingdom, how remote soever, which of us would but strive to go to him? What haste should we make, what pains should we take, to get as near to him as we could, that we might not only see him, but enjoy his company and hear some of his divine discourses from his own mouth! with what profound reverence should we approach unto his presence! How attentively should we hearken to every word that came from him! How glad should we be to see him smiling upon us, and owning us for his servants and disciples! And when we had been a while in his company, how loth should we be to leave him! How apt should we be to cry out, as St. Peter did at the transfiguration, *Lord, it is good for us to be here!* There is a way whereby we may meet with our blessed Saviour every day in the year, and enjoy his presence as effectually, to all intents and purposes, as if he now dwelt among us, as he did once among the Jews, in our own nature." We have his own blessed assurance that he is with his disciples whenever they meet *in his name.*

Make it then your great aim and desire to MEET IN THE NAME OF CHRIST. Do not come to hear because it is expected of you, or because you wish for something to talk about, or want to be amused or excited, or desire to say you have heard such a preacher; but meet *in the name of Christ.* In order to do this, go to hear AS HIS DISCIPLES, as those who belong to him and desire to be taught by him. Go, IN DEPENDENCE ON HIS PROMISES: there are many great and precious promises given to those that hear. Let Da-

vid's feelings then be your's, with reference to those promises—*Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until he have mercy upon us.* Psalm cxxiii. 1, 2. GO IN OBEDIENCE TO HIS AUTHORITY. He says seven times to the churches in Asia: *He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.* Let the will, and precept, and direction of Christ be your main reason for hearing; and finally go WITH A STEDFAST EYE TO HIM AS YOUR MEDIATOR. In order truly to meet in the name of Christ, we must trust in him as our only Saviour, aspire after the blessings of his salvation, rely on his atonement, come to God through him, submit to his word, and yield ourselves to the influences of his good Spirit.

It is not therefore the multitude, but the faith and piety of those that assemble together, that ensures the presence of Christ. The Roman Catholics would gladly, under the name of the Church, and from such a promise, maintain the infallibility of their particular Church, or of general councils; but wherever particular Churches seek their own glory, or Councils have been held otherwise than out of regard to the glory of Christ, as they had no shadow of claim to inherit this promise, so they have greatly erred from his truth.

This peculiar privilege may be improved by an important and individual application to every reader. Have you never been able to say, while in Christian assemblies, *Truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ?* then you have never seen their true blessedness. Probably you have never once thought of Christ. If you have had no view to his presence, you cannot be surprised that you have not enjoyed it. Here, as in other things, *he that seeketh findeth.* O that you went to hear his ministers with the same desires which *those Greeks*, who *came up to worship at the Feast*, felt, when they said to Philip, *Sir, we would see Jesus!* Look only to our Lord Jesus Christ

as the only righteous advocate and prevalent intercessor for every good. When your hearts are raised to fellowship with him in his ordinances, you will experience a new life, and joy, and power, in the ministration of his word.

O Christians! let us never be content with the outward ordinance, without real communion with Christ in it: and should we not yet have attained this, at least may we feel a hungering and thirsting after it, and diligently seek it till we find it.

CHAPTER V.

THE HOLY SPIRIT, RECEIVED IN HEARING, THE ONLY SOURCE OF GENUINE PROFIT.

THERE are those who attend public worship, and hear in the course of years, hundreds, perhaps thousands of faithful sermons, and yet manifestly by their general spirit and conduct, remain unconverted and worldly. There are others who in the main derive good from their attendance, and yet cannot with truth be said to obtain edification, in any degree in proportion to the vast opportunities of religious instruction which they receive. And there are, again, those evidently fed, and nourished, and blessed by the sermons which they hear, and steadily growing *in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

How is this to be accounted for? and whence does this variety proceed? It is not owing merely to a difference in the ministry. You may observe all this under the same minister, and in the same congregation. It is not owing to a difference in natural character, for it is observable in persons of the same natural disposition; nay, we sometimes see that those characters whom we should be ready to think most favourably affected towards the truth, are those on whom it makes the least impression; and those whom we should think most likely to receive it gladly, and improve it largely, are the very persons who reject it.

The Bible explains the cause of this apparent anomaly. All, by nature, are averse to divine truth, and would reject it; and various motives, besides love of the truth, may

produce an outward attendance on the ministry. Man's own good disposition makes not the difference. Neither is the wisdom of the minister that which produces the change. The whole difference is from divine grace. This is so obvious, and so admitted by real Christians, that while the Apostle asks the question, he thinks it needless to give the answer—*Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?* 1 Cor. iv. 7. But we are far too apt to lose sight of this, and to forget who aloue gives the blessiug. We depend on the minister, or on our own fancied powers of improvement: and if the writer may judge of others by himself, this is far too much the case even with those who admit the doctrine of divine grace. He would ask himself, and ask others the question, are we living under the full influence of this doctrine? do we constantly, in practice, as well as professedly, seek the grace of God, so as not only to know experimentally its necessity, but to feel also its blessedness?

The whole subject may be practically brought before us under the assertion of the Apostle, *Neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.* This assertion was not made by a novice in religion, but by one who had deep knowledge and experience; it was not made by a wild enthusiast, but by a holy, sober, and practical teacher; it was not made by an unsuccessful minister, but by one more blessed with success, than any other huuan instructor has ever been; it was not asserted merely as the conviction of human wisdom, but as the divinely-inspired dictate of the Holy Ghost.

The figure is very expressive. The allusion is to the husbandman, or gardener, putting plants into the ground, and cultivating them. They do not grow by virtue of any power derived from the gardener. "God gave to the plant its life and nature by which it shoots up, buds, and brings forth fruit. God makes his sun to shine, and his rain to descend upon it, and so it becomes vigorous and fruitful." So in spiritual agriculture: it is not any ability in man that communicates the power of growing, nor is it merely

any native vigour that causes the fruitfulness ; but the blessing of God in the use of appointed means. Our souls flourish and are fruitful as they are cherished by the beams of the Sun of Righteousness, and partake of the refreshing showers of divine grace.

Human agents cannot of themselves CONVERT THE SOUL. Look at our state by nature, as described in the Holy Scriptures, *dead in trespasses and sins.* What can the dead do of themselves ? What human being can give life to the dead ? We are described as in ourselves, *blind* and *in darkness.*—Who can open the eyes of those that are born blind ? Our hearts are said to be *hard* and *stony*—what human power can make them soft and tender ? It is evident from the scriptural account of our natural state, that we can neither convert our own hearts, nor those of others."*

* The Author is not ignorant of the great difficulties that attend the subject of the existence of moral evil, and man's sin and inability, as consistent with God's wisdom and benevolence, and of the way in which it has exercised the highest human intellect, and the ablest Christian writers; but he rests in the plain words of Scripture. Those who have hastily made up their minds, without due consideration, and are positive in their own views of this subject, would do well to see how much may be said on all sides, and how nearly real Christians agree, by reading such a work as Baxter's Catholic Theology ; or if that be too voluminous, the abstract of it in "Bates's Observations on Important Points in Divinity." Dean Milner on the Liberty of the Will, Edwards on the Will, and Scott's Synod of Dort, are instructive works in the same reference. The real solution of the difficulty seems above our comprehension ; and, was it not intended to be so, for the exercise and proof of our faith, and submission to God ? Let us repose with unshaken faith and perfect comfort in the divine wisdom and love, righteousness and perfection. Satan has, by the unbridled speculations of men trusting in their own wisdom, even where their object might be good, gained an immense advantage to divide and distract the church, and to bring in separations, and distance, and hatred, among those who should love as brethren. The Author is fully satisfied, that in the warmth of controversy, and in the desire to guard against opposing errors, many writers of real piety and great talents have used far too strong language, and Christian love (the *more excellent way,*) has been forsaken, and a mere war of words has unhappily resulted. All irreverence towards God, or so speaking as if the creature could find out the great Creator to perfection ; anything that would give the praise of man's salvation to himself, and not to God in Christ, the light, joy, and hope of the world ; or on the other hand, any thing that would weaken moral obligation ; and anything that casts the fault of man's sin and ruin on God, (the very essence of the refinements of Heathenism) should be most carefully avoided. And after all the researches of men of the acutest minds, we are compelled to come back and rest in the simple and plain declaration of God's word. On these subjects, it is especially important not to be *wise above what is written.* 1 Cor. vi. 6. The wisest know no more than is in the Scriptures revealed to the poor and unlearned. *If any man speak, let him speak as the Oracles of God.* See the Rev. John Scott's valuable Sermon on this text.

There is one plain and obvious passage on this point that cannot be mistaken. St. John, describing the true spring of regeneration, and our adoption into the family of God, says of the sons of God, (John i. 13.) that they *were born not of blood*, not by natural descent, or earthly power, *nor of the will of the flesh*, not by their own, or any other innate good disposition, or desire, *nor of the will of man*, nor by the power of understanding and reason, or any persuasion, influence, desire, or efforts of their fellow-creatures—these are not the first causes and true springs of this great change: *but they were born of God:* of him alone, as going before, providing and prospering all other means, and to whom alone must be ascribed all the praise and glory.

All ages confirm this. Look at the period before the coming of Christ! See how often the ministry of Moses, notwithstanding all the splendid miracles with which it was sanctioned and attested, failed of success among the Israelites! What was the reason? It is declared, (Deut. xxix. 4.) *The Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.* Look at the ministry of Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others! There you see men of various gifts and talents, men of firm integrity, of unshaken boldness, of the sublimest genius, and of the tenderest affections, labouring with comparatively little effect. The reason we find, John xii. 39, 40. *Therefore they could not believe, because that Isaiah saith, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts, that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.* Look even at the ministry of our Lord himself? His character was perfect; his doctrine altogether wise, and pure, and exactly adapted to his hearers; yet it pleased him in his own ministry to let us have an illustrious proof of the truth which we are establishing; and even he could say, *Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?* The labours of the Apostles, accompanied with the promised and full effusion of the Holy Spirit, were largely blessed; but in some instances that was withheld, and then even

their sermons seemed only to harden and enrage those to whom they were addressed. These things may shew us the insufficiency of human agency without the grace of God.

Human agents cannot of themselves EDIFY THOSE WHO ARE CONVERTED, or carry on the work of divine grace. Men still retain, when converted, a carnal nature; and though that be mortified, and brought under by a divine counteracting power, yet there are strong remains of it, and it is still enmity against God; and fresh *supplies of the Spirit of Jesus Christ*, (Phil. i. 19.) day by day, can alone enable us to vanquish and overcome our corruption. Without me, says the only-wise Lord, whatever man may say, *without me, ye can do nothing*. The Apostle excludes both minister and people from all share in imparting or procuring spiritual good. *We are not sufficient*, says the holy Paul, *to think any thing as of ourselves—Neither is he that watereth any thing*.

Success in hearing, and growth in grace, do not primarily depend on the ministry. Who more able, or wise, or holy, than Paul? who more eloquent or mighty in the Scriptures, than Apollos? But Paul plants, and Apollos waters in vain, except as *God giveth the increase*. 1 Cor. iii. 4—7. In the largest success which the Gospel ever had, preached by the Apostles or any others, though multitudes received the Gospel, we never find that ALL who heard, believed and were converted.

These and other similar passages respecting divine teaching, cannot be referred merely (as Socinians endeavour to do) to an outward Revelation. This will be evident, not only from what has already been mentioned, but also from the prayers for those, and the prayers of those, in possession of the Holy Scriptures. The prayer of the Apostle for the Ephesians (chap. i. and iii.) clearly shews that more is needed than the outward Revelation which they at that time had. As it has been remarked, "If God gave spiritual knowledge no other way than by his providence, affording outward means, men ought not to pray for light

from God after once they get the Gospel; for the prayer in that case would be for new revelations of truths not contained in the word of God, the scope of which is enthusiasm and delusion." Prayers in the Scriptures for divine teaching, by men already possessing the Scriptures, and the promises of guidance and teaching to particular characters, (Ps. xxv. 9; Prov. iii. 6.) the mere outward Scripture being possessed by all men of every character, shew the same need of inward divine teaching. True it is, the outward revelation is full of light and truth: true it is we have natural understanding and capacity to comprehend what it reveals. It is not from any defect in the Bible, or in our natural powers, that we insist on the necessity of having the Holy Spirit; but it is because of our *evil heart of unbelief.*

The learning, and human qualifications of the hearer are not the true spring of improvement. The Apostle says, (1 Cor. i. 26, 27.) *Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called; but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise.* Nor does a growing improvement of the word depend on man's natural goodness, nor on any natural power or effort in man: *it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth; but of God that sheweth mercy.* Well it is that it does not depend on us; every experienced Christian heartily concurs in the sentiment of the Apostle, *In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing.* We have no naturally holy dispositions, inducing us to love divine truth, and embrace it, and duly improve it. Those dispositions by which we do so, come from the special grace and mercy of God. How humbling is this doctrine; and yet it is the very ground-work of all true faith, repentance, humility, hope, love, and happiness!

If it be objected against such a statement that its tendency is to produce indolence and despondency—that it leads to a disregard and neglect of human instruments and efforts—we reply, By no means. And the very figure by which the Holy Scripture illustrates the doctrine, furnishes

a sufficient answer to such an objection. Shall the husbandman never plough, nor harrow, nor sow, because he cannot make the seed shoot, and grow, and spring up, nor command the sun to shine, nor cause the rain to descend? Shall the gardener never plant, because he cannot make his plant take root and flourish, and bear fruit, without the heavenly influence? He uses the means, and God gives the blessing. Let us do the same thing, and we shall as surely receive a blessing. It has been well observed, "The seaman knows that he cannot sail without wind, and the wind is not in his power, nor in the power of any creature; yet though it is not in his power to command a favourable gale when he pleases, he does not therefore neglect every thing concerning his ship; he fits it out, and makes preparation, till that wind, which depends upon the power of the Creator, come." *Faith comes by hearing;* that is the divinely-appointed method for conversion and growth in grace. Where preaching is neglected and despised, there religion does not flourish. Where Christ is proclaimed to attentive hearers, there, invariably, a blessing follows. The *word* does *not return void, but prospers in the thing whereto* God *sends it.* We speak of preaching and hearing, not only because this is the subject of the Treatise, but because it is God's great ordinance for this end; for though the statement of divine truth be so plain and simple in the Scriptures, that a wayfaring man need not err therein; yet through our corruption we disregard the sacred truth when hid in a book. The blazing torch of Revelation must be lifted up, that every eye may behold it. We need the continual and powerful ministry of the word to awaken and excite our attention, to instruct and inform our minds, and to press home on our consciences the lessons which God has given us.

Should any still ask, What is the use of directions? or, Why should we be exhorted to duty? We reply with Maclaurin, "Exhortations shew us our weakness, onr duty, and our danger. They shew us what God approves, hates, or desires; and what is necessary to salvation. The

corruption of man's nature would never have appeared to be so evil as it is, if it were not for the offers of God's grace. Were it not that experience proves it, men might be ready to think that it is impossible that wicked, corrupt creatures, shortly to die, shortly to receive a sentence to endless misery, would refuse or despise the offers of reconciliation."

Should any go so far as to ridicule all expectations of divine grace as folly or enthusiasm, let them remember, that they do in fact ridicule all prayer and worship of God, and all religious services. There are persons who make a conscience of outward worship, and yet laugh at the very meaning of the prayers which they offer. In truth, as it has been observed, "they mock God when they pray to him to make them holy: for if there be not a divine operation on the soul of a sinner to give just and holy inclinations, it is a mocking God to seek those things from him, to pray to him, to mortify our sins, and to cleanse our hearts, or to praise him."

But if any reader have entertained the objection that this doctrine fosters indolence, we would ask, May not this lead you to detect the real state of your own mind? You have seen how the husbandman and the gardener act, and how the general conduct of men in temporal matters meets the difficulty; is not then the attaching any weight to such a difficulty an indication of a want of real concern for your spiritual interests? Are you as willing to receive divine truth, as really desirous of spiritual good, as thoroughly disposed to use means for the advancement of your eternal, as they are for that of their earthly concerns?

But, though the insufficiency of man's teaching should not lead us to disregard and neglect the ministry, it should teach us not to overvalue human instruments, or set one against another. The Apostle had to reprove this fault—*While one saith, I am of Paul, and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal?* This is an error into which even good men are apt to fall. Mr. Cecil remarks, "I once said to myself, in the foolishness of my heart, 'What sort of ser-

mon must that have been which was preached by St. Peter, when three thousand souls were converted at once?' What sort of sermon? such as other sermons! There is nothing to be found in it extraordinary. The effect was not produced by his eloquence, but by the mighty power of God present with his word. It is in vain to attend one minister after another, and to hear sermon after sermon, unless we pray that the Holy Spirit accompany his word."

Let us then *cease from man.* They who fancy any human being, however great or excellent, to be the only means of their conversion or edification, are guilty of idolatry, and transfer to the creature that regard and confidence which is due only to the Creator. Do not sacrilegiously divide the honour between man and God. While you esteem highly and love sincerely the faithful labourer for his works' sake, give all the glory of every good to God alone. What we transfer to ourselves, we take from God. Be afraid of being lavish in extolling man, or thinking highly of the creature. Faithful ministers dread to receive human praise, lest God should be dishonoured. It is his purpose that *the lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted.*

These things amply shew the weakness and insufficiency of man, without the grace of God to convert and edify the soul.

But, blessed be God, this is only part of the truth, and the humbling part; there is another part of the subject full of consolation. While man can of himself do nothing, *through Christ strengthening* him he *can do all things;* and *God,* who commands the seed to be sown, himself *giveth the increase.**

* While the fact of God's operation on the soul is strenuously maintained, we pretend not to explain the mode. Many of the controversies which have agitated the church, and produced the most hostile feelings, might have been spared, had the assertion of our Lord been duly weighed—*The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof; but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.* O that men were willing to be ignorant, and to confess their ignorance, where God has not revealed his ways to them!

The form in which the Apostle speaks when he says *God giveth the increase*, claims attention, as it excludes the hearer as well as the preacher. The Apostle does not say the hearer of the word produces the increase by the good use of his own powers. The views which some entertain, had they been correct, would have led to such a mode of expression. They would have said, All depends on the state of your own mind. If you have a good heart, and a right disposition, then you will hear with advantage. This is very true in one way, but very false in another. It is true, if we duly regard God's grace, making the heart good, and giving suitable dispositions, and blessing the ministry of the word : but it is false, if we imagine any man has by nature a good heart ; for where is the heart naturally disposed to spiritual and heavenly things ? where is the man with a truly holy disposition, or that has by his own power and ability acquired it ? None such can be found. The special grace of God is wanting for that very preparation of the heart which is needful for our hearing aright ; or, in the words of the church of England, "We have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, [that is preceding or going before us] that we may have a good will, and working with us when we have that good will."

The expression *giveth the increase*, however, suggests that it pleases God to work through the instrumentality of man. It is not 'God makes the Christian without means,' 'God does the work without employing man's agency ;' but the expression is such as to shew that man must plant and water, must faithfully use all the appointed means, or he cannot expect the wished-for increase. The means must be used, and God will not fail to give his blessing in the instances, degree, manner, and proportion that pleases him, in his sovereign wisdom and love. If sometimes the means fail of the desired success, at others they shall have a large blessing, according to his own will. Thus are we equally guarded against proud, self-righteous, and self-sufficient

thoughts of human ability on the one hand, and disregard of means and Antinomian licentiousness on the other. "The sinner cannot quicken his own soul, but he ought to use the means of grace. If we would have the Lord do for us and ours what man cannot do, we must diligently attend to all those things which we can, and ought to do."

We will now show, that on those very points on which the Scriptures declare the insufficiency of man, they fully express the power of divine grace in conjunction with the word.

Thus God CONVERTS THE SOUL. He promises it as his work—*A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.* Ezek. xxxvi. 26. If any have spiritual life, the Apostle shews them where to ascribe all the praise—*God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ.*

And this great change is BY MEANS OF THE WORD. St. James (i. 18) speaks very expressly on this point—*Of his own will begat he us, with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures; wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear.* St. Peter is equally decisive—*Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever . . . . and this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.* 1 Pet. i. 23—25. Thus all glory is taken from man, and given to God; and yet the means of salvation which God blesses, are carefully and specially noticed. So the Apostle Paul tells the Thessalonians, *God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth.*

Then look at the history of God's dealings with his church. The best human instruments, as we have shewn, were insufficient, when God did not work by his Spirit. The weakest are mighty through him. Whom did God appoint to convert the world? Philosophers, Statesmen, Orators, the learned, and the wise? No! the very reverse.

God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise, and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty, and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are, that no flesh should glory in his presence. 1 Cor. i. 27—29. Twelve men of humble birth, many of them poor fishermen, despised Galileans, and of slender attainments, were the chief instruments in commencing and establishing the kingdom of God upon earth. By their ministry, we find in the Acts of the Apostles, when the first fruits of the Spirit were given, three thousand were converted in one day, and presently they grew to five thousand. They are dispersed by persecutions, but the church, under this divine influence, only increases more and more. In Judea and Samaria, Cæsarea and Damascus, the Gospel is gladly received. It still spread wider and wider, till it covered the known world. Such was the invincible energy of the Holy Ghost; *so mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.*

Our Reformers felt strongly their need of Divine grace. "Without this grace," says Jewell,* "you can do nothing; you can neither feel the burden of your sins, nor seek to be eased of them, nor perceive when they are forgiven; you cannot rend your heart, and set apart from you the vanities and lusts of the flesh which does evermore fight against the soul; you cannot discern the word of God, and by it enter the way to everlasting life; you cannot abhor that which is evil and cleave unto that which is good; without the grace of God, you cannot continue stedfast and constant in faith and in hope of the mercies of God through our Saviour Jesus Christ. The words of the preacher enter in at the ear, the Spirit of God conveyeth them to the heart."

The state of the church of Christ in our own day manifests the same truth. Where there may be deep learning, great talent, and many external qualifications, still, if Christ

* See his Exposition on 1 Thess. i. 1—5.

is not preached, and his Spirit is not honoured, and the great doctrines of his Gospel are adulterated or concealed, no spiritual good is done ; not a single soul is converted from the error of his way. It pleases God, too, sometimes, to try his faithful servants, even where he has bestowed superior gifts and talents, with comparatively small success ; though he generally in one way or the other, largely uses the gifts which he confers, to the extension of his own kingdom and glory ; and really, and perhaps more widely in the result, prospers their labours.* At other times, God has been pleased to use a preacher with very little learning, and not endued with great powers of mind, but with much zeal and love, and a devoted heart, and to make him, though insignificant in the eyes of the world, and perhaps one who really speaks and acts in some respects indiscreetly, yet to make him the successful instrument of conveying his grace to many immortal souls.† His design is the same now, as in the days of the Apostles, *that no flesh should glory in his presence :* that all may see and acknowledge, respecting Christians, the truth of the Apostle's declaration—*Of him*, (that is, of God,) *are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption : that according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.*

It is only the same divine grace that is efficacious TO EDIFY THE CONVERTED MAN.

It is true that the ministry of the word is the means of edification. It is appointed of God for that purpose. Eph. iv. 11, 12. *He gave some Apostles, and some Prophets, and some Evangelists, and some Pastors and teachers, for the*

* We see this in such cases as Hervey, Adam, and Scott, men (comparatively with other very inferior men in judgment and acquirements) little prospered in their personal ministry, yet largely and extensively blessed in their publications.

† The debate between an aged Christian of little human learning, who had suffered in the persecutions, and an arrogant Philosopher, who derided the Clergy as ignorant, is very instructive. While many Christians were fearful as to the result, the Philosopher was so struck with the plain account of the creation ; the incarnation, life, and death of Christ, and the future judgment, given by the Christian, that he owned himself vanquished, declaring that he was changed by a divine influence. See Sozomen, lib. i, ch. xvii ; or Milner, vol. ii.

perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Yet these are only the means, and effectual only as the Holy Ghost makes them so. All our growth in piety is in proportion to the free grace of God, giving according to his own infinite love and good pleasure. Eph. i. 5 ; Phil. ii. 13. The Apostle, in the case of the Thessalonians, puts this distinction very clearly and expressly. They were greatly edified by his preaching, and he shews why they were so ; *our Gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance.* It is this divine power that takes away prejudices, (2 Cor. x. 5.) and makes a lasting impression by writing the truth on our hearts. Jer. xxxi. 31 ; 2 Cor. iii. 3.

That the Holy Spirit is the only efficient cause of all spiritual edification, might easily be shewn at length, by going through all the graces of the advanced Christian, and marking how his faith, his repentance, humility, love to God, and deadness to the world are given him from above. One passage may suffice—*the fruit of the Spirit,* (not of our natural power and disposition, not of the talents of man, not of eloquence and learning,) *the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.*

The experience of Christians corresponds with this statement. The same truths have a very different effect on our minds at different times, when we can assign no ordinary cause adequate to account for this difference. Sometimes when we read the Bible, or hear sermons, we feel dead and dull, wandering and distracted ; we strive perhaps against it, and yet feel equally lifeless and incapable of raising our thoughts heavenward to God. At other times *the word is quick and powerful ;* every part of it seems full of weighty and important truth, our hearts are softened and made tender, we receive the Gospel, we retain it, and are edified by those very truths which at a former season made no impression at all. The principles which we have maintained from the Holy Scriptures explain all this. In one case it pleases

God justly to withhold that grace to which we have no claim, and can only receive at any time of unmerited mercy ; and at another time, in boundless mercy and undeserved love, *he worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

The variety which we may observe among real Christians springs from *one and the self-same Spirit dividing to every man severally as he will.* A great difference may be seen among Christians. There are those of whose final acceptance with God we should be sorry to doubt, for they appear to be resting on the only sure foundation, our Lord Jesus Christ, and to be generally upright and sincere in their conduct ; yet their tempers are but little subdued and sanctified, their conversation is generally on worldly things, or the mere externals of religion, and they manifestly enjoy little comfort in the ways of godliness.

But you sometimes see another character, a devoted Christian, whose heart is filled with love to Christ. There is a holy atmosphere, as it were, about him. Wherever he goes, he is a blessing. He is like a fragrant flower brought into a room, the refreshing odour of which diffuses itself among all the company.* His reception of the truth has made him meek and humble, kind and loving, holy and devout, cheerful and happy. He goes about doing good, a fair pattern of the great Redeemer, in whom he is trusting and rejoicing, in whose presence he lives, and whose glory he is daily advancing.

The whole of this difference is according as God the Holy Spirit deals to every man the measure of grace. There is no Christian disposition of which he is not the author. The lukewarm Christian seeks not, or seeks not constantly, and earnestly, this aid. The devoted Christian quickened by the Spirit of Christ, has sought and obtained a large supply of the Spirit, and he enters fully into the declaration, *We are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves ; but our sufficiency is of God.*

* A Hindoo convert recently expressed this sentiment to his Christian instructor thus beautifully, "May God's mercy be with you: for ever I bless him that I have seen you ; as the sandal-tree communicates its fragrance to every thing that touches it, so may I retain the savour of your conversation."

Immediately connected with our edification are three important blessings, imparted by the Holy Spirit through hearing, which it may be profitable more particularly to consider: The knowledge of the glory of Christ—the consolation of the soul of the believer—and his sealing unto the day of redemption.

(1.) The Holy Spirit specially GLORIFIES CHRIST IN THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD. Our Lord speaking of the work of the Spirit says, (John xvi. 13, 14.) *Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all truth, for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak, and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.* The Holy Ghost shews us unsearchable riches in Christ, suited to all our wants, and never to be exhausted. He discovers to us, efficaciously and experimentally, wisdom in Christ for our ignorance, righteousness for our guilt and condemnation, sanctification for our pollution, and full redemption from all our misery and ruin. We cannot discern this of ourselves. Our minds are covered with prejudice, and our hearts filled with the love of sin. The Holy Spirit removes our prejudices, purifies our affections, and enables us to discern the inexpressible value of Christ and his salvation. By nature we see *no form nor comeliness* in Christ, *no beauty in him that we should desire him.* Hence the Apostle tells us, that *no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.* When taught by this Spirit, the soul supremely values and eagerly thirsts after the knowledge of Christ, and feels and says with the Apostle, *I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.* Phil. iii. 8. The atonement and intercession of our Lord Christ, his love and grace, his tenderness, sympathy, and compassion, are discerned by us, and applied with power to our hearts through the teaching of the Holy Ghost, in the ministry of the word. *Jesus Christ, and him crucified,* is the very substance of a

faithful ministry, and such preaching is *in demonstration of the spirit and of power*, and Christians can say of such truths, *God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.* 1 Cor. ii. 1—10. To *preach Christ* is the minister's work ; to *hear Christ* is the people's ; but to *reveal Christ* is the express office of the Holy Ghost. If any of my readers have hitherto felt little value for Christ, and little love to him, and feeble desires after him, they may here see the true cause—a want of the special aid of the Holy Ghost. O let it be our great concern to obtain this inestimable benefit ; let it be our great desire that the Holy Spirit may discover the glories of the Saviour, as exhibited in his word, that our hearts may be drawn to him.

(2.) The Holy Spirit makes THE WORD OF CHRIST A SOURCE OF GREAT COMFORT AND GLADNESS. This is one important part of the ministry. The blessed Spirit gives directions to ministers, *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem :* he makes it their office *to comfort them that mourn.* But all their ministrations are only instrumental. It is the *Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, who teaches you all things, and brings all things to your remembrance.* Therefore when the hearts of the disciples were troubled at the thoughts of losing their Lord, he dwells on the work of the Holy Spirit as a comforter—*I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever, even the Spirit of Truth : I will not leave you comfortless, I will come unto you.* Indeed, all his purifying and sanctifying influences are calculated to produce this effect ; *the fruit of the Spirit* being *love, joy, and peace,* must console and gladden. What a cheering and delightful effect of the Gospel is here! Christian reader, all your *joy and peace in believing,* and all your *abounding in hope,* is *through the power of the Holy Ghost.* He applies the blood of Christ, as shed for sinners, with power to your conscience ; he gives you *the full assurance of hope ;* he causes you to *rejoice in the Lord.* When you are burdened by sin, when you are desponding under a sense of your guilt and weakness, when you are ready to

sink under your own unprofitableness and deadness, then the Holy Spirit can and does revive and console by some sweet promise, and cheer the heart by bringing before us the love of our heavenly Father, and the bowels of compassion in our gracious Redeemer. Like the gentle and tender dove, the Holy Spirit comes down and lights upon us, and soothes, and tranquillizes, and gladdens. He kindles a holy fire, and yet fills us with inexpressible meekness, kindness and gentleness. O the blessed state of that mind in which the Holy Ghost ever reigns, and which he ever replenishes!

(3.) The work of the Spirit through hearing, is also compared to AN IMPRESSION MADE BY A SEAL. *In whom ye also trusted after that ye heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation; in whom after that ye believed ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise:* (Eph. i. 13.) *sealed unto the day of redemption.* The end of sealing is to mark for one's own, by stamping an impression similar to the seal. Thus God's children are by his Spirit made like him in holiness, and receive the assurance that they belong to God, and shall partake of the heavenly inheritance. Eph. i. 14. The blessed Spirit, when truly received, produces all holy dispositions. He humbles the proud heart. He makes the word powerful like a hammer, to break in pieces that which is hard. Jer. xxiii. 29. The *great and exceeding precious promises* received by faith, fill the heart with love to God, and love to man, and we become *partakers of the divine nature.* The same Spirit gives a cleansing and sanctifying power to the word, (Eph, v. 26,) and fills the believing hearer with full assurance of hope, and joy in the Holy Ghost. The statutes become the rejoicing of the heart, and our *heritage for ever.* These, and similar holy and happy graces and tempers, are the marks of this Divine seal. O that every reader may be able to discern them in his own soul!

Such being the gracious character of the work of the Spirit, how invaluable is HEARING THE TRUTH AS ONE OF THE ORDINARY AND APPOINTED MEANS BY WHICH

GOD CONVEYS THIS INESTIMABLE GIFT! This is the way in which God bestows his grace. *We receive the promise of the Spirit, by the hearing of faith;* it is that divinely-instituted plan, with which God's power concurs. It has been observed by Maclaurin, that there are two great principles of Christianity, distinguishing it from all other religions. "1. That the knowledge of Christ Jesus, the doctrine of God's grace is the means of turning our souls to God, and of cleansing us from our filthiness and our idols. And then, 2. That though that doctrine be an excellent means of turning us to God; that it is but a means, that it is but an instrument; the efficacy of it depends upon the manifestation of the power of God, *that exceeding greatness of power* that raises souls from the dead." Both these principles are brought before us, when we are told that the first Christian teachers went to Antioch *preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned unto the Lord.* Acts xi. 20, 21. This teaches us a most important practical lesson as to what we should expect and desire in hearing. Let us not attend a public ministry from curiosity, custom, love to a favourite preacher, or the mere alarms of conscience; but let us go in obedience to the will of God, hoping to obtain conversion if unconverted, and growth in grace if we have obtained mercy: in short, expecting to receive Divine succour and strength in the way of God's appointment. O Christian reader, if you would derive profit in hearing, we beseech you mainly to look for God's help and blessing! No preacher in the world can do you good without God's special grace. While you go to hear, say with the Psalmist, *Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens.* We are ever too forgetful of Him, from whom every good comes. We, poor and insufficient creatures, form a sad estimate of the need and value of his grace. Let us then, if we really desire spiritual blessings, look more to the Lord, the Spirit, and come to the Christian assembly, hear while in that assembly, and return from it, in the spirit of prayer. Thus hearing the sermons,

though poor in themselves, will be blessed to our spiritual and eternal good.

Thus they of old received the Holy Spirit. Cornelius is directed to send for Peter, who preaches the Gospel to him and those with him; and *while Peter was speaking, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.* The Apostle Paul appeals to the Galatians, *This only would I learn of you; received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?* Wisdom is described as calling men from sin and ignorance, saying, *Turn you at my reproof; behold, I will pour out my Spirit upon you, I will make known my words unto you.* God honours the ministry of the word, and the doctrines of salvation, by making them the appointed means of communicating his grace, the very channel through which the waters of life flow down to us.

But do you question whether you may now hope to receive this gift, or ask whether it is still bestowed? We reply, God has declared that he will *give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him.* He has graciously promised, *It shall came to pass in the last days, I will pour out of my Spirit on all flesh,* a promise belonging to the whole period of the Christian Dispensation, and embracing in the comprehensive terms, *all flesh,* the whole human race, as St. Peter tells the Jews; *the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.*

Do you allege your unworthiness? Remember that the blessing is BESTOWED FREELY. True it is, it cost our Saviour much. He shed his most precious blood, rose from the dead, and ascended on high, that he might receive this gift *for the rebellious also.* Psalm lxviii. 18. But we obtain it most freely. The very expression, *I will pour out of my Spirit,* shews how freely it is given to us, even as freely as the clouds pour out the rain that refreshes and fructifies the earth. As free as the light of heaven, as free as the air we breathe, as free as the water we drink, so freely is this gift granted to all that seek. The invitation of Christ,

with reference to this very gift, is, *If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.*

Do you still doubt whether you are included? Remember that THERE IS NO RESTRICTION IN THE PROMISE. No blessing is more unreservedly and unrestrictedly, more expressly and decidedly promised, than the gift of the Holy Spirit. Our Lord appeals to the universal, and the strongest feelings of mankind, the love of parents to their children, and then adds, *How much more shall your heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him.* The promise includes, as we have just said, *all flesh.* Acts ii. 17. None need shut themselves out from so great a benefit. It belongs to the old; *Seek ye the Lord while he may be found.* It belongs to the young; *I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring.* High and low, rich and poor, converted and unconverted, all need, and all may be benefited by the communications of this divine gift.

Would you then, Christian reader, largely receive this divine assistance? use the means of grace only as the means, and not the end. Be much in reading the Holy Scriptures, and give a diligent attendance to the preaching of the Gospel, still looking upward for that divine unction by which these means shall be made a real blessing. Remember too, that this Holy Spirit, like his emblem, the tender dove, is easily driven away. *Grieve* him *not* by the indulgence of a worldly and carnal temper; *quench not* his light by any impure and sinful passions. *Resist not, provoke not* this blessed Comforter. But *walk in the Spirit,* and mind *the things of the Spirit; for as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

This doctrine is peculiar to revealed religion, and it is of daily and constant use. It teaches us man's utter insufficiency, and God's fulness and all-sufficiency. Let it lead us to the life of faith and love; to a simple dependence on Divine strength, given through a crucified Lord, to a constant application to him for the supply of all our need, and

to fervent prayers for the outpouring of the Spirit on the whole world.

This chapter cannot be concluded more suitably, than with the prayer of the Martyr Ridley,—" O heavenly Father, the author and fountain of all truth, the bottomless sea of all understanding; send down, we beseech thee, thy Holy Spirit into our hearts, and lighten our understandings with the beams of thy heavenly grace. We ask this, O merciful Father, not in respect of our deserts, but for thy dear Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ's sake. Amen."

CHAPTER VI.

THE RELATIVE SITUATIONS AND RESPECTIVE DUTIES OF MINISTERS AND OF PEOPLE.

THE New Testament makes it sufficiently clear, that from the beginning of the Gospel, there has ever been a peculiar body of men set apart for the instruction and edification of the church. The twelve apostles were first appointed, and the foundation of the Christian ministry is the direction to them—*Go ye, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* Matt. xxviii. 19. 20. The apostles went forth and preached every where; and, as the work grew and extended, they appointed others, with directions to ordain fresh teachers, as the church was enlarged. St. Paul says to Titus, *For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou should set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city as I had appointed thee:* (Titus i. 5.) and he tells Timothy,—*The things which thou hast heard of me, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.* 2 Tim. ii. 2.

The necessity of this appointment for the salvation of men is strongly put by the apostle when shewing the connection of prayer with our salvation; he asks, *How shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?* Rom. x. 14. The

design of this appointment is explained by the apostle, when he shews the object which God had in view in raising up different kinds of teachers in the beginning of Christianity. *He gave some apostles and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*

There may be discovered in the New Testament, as it appears to the writer, and especially in those parts descriptive of it in its latest and most settled state, those three distinct orders of ministers which the Church of England adopts.* The late Mr. Hey of Leeds has drawn out the proofs of this from the New Testament in a very simple and perspicuous manner. It is allowed that the terms *Bishop* (επισκοπος, overseer) and *Elder* (πρεσβυτερος, whence the English word Priest) are used for the same kind of ministers in the New Testament. It is clear that this office was distinct from that of the Deacon, which was probationary with respect to a higher office. 1 Tim. iii. 1—13.

The question then comes, Are there proofs that there was a superior class of ministers to those called by the name of Deacons and Presbyters, or Bishops? an office to which the name of Bishop has since been exclusively confined. The author decidedly thinks that there are such proofs, though only incidental, and much less insisted on than the character and conduct of ministers.† A peculiar office was committed to Timothy and Titus: (1 Tim. iv. 14; 2 Tim. i. 8; Titus i. 5.) they were directed to ordain presbyters and deacons, (1 Tim. iii; Titus i. 5; 2 Tim. ii. 2.) to superintend their doctrine, (1 Tim. i. 3.) to judge

* The Author wishes as much as possible to abstain from controverted ground, but while Christians of other communions, in valuable and practical works, give views in which he cannot concur, he feels called on to give this statement. He concurs, however, in Professor Campbell's remarks, that the question so much agitated in regard to the original form of government established by the Apostles, though not trivial, is by no means of that consequence which some warm disputants would affect to make it. *The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ, is acceptable to God, and approved of men.*

† "We see," Hoornbeck justly remarks, "that the Apostles in their writings were far more solicitous about the *virtues* than the *degrees* of ministers; and more described and inculcated the *duties* that became that state, than determined the *form of government*.

their conduct, (1 Tim. v. 19.) and to regulate matters not settled by divine authority, (Titus i. 5 ; 1 Cor. xi. 34.) Most intelligent persons will allow that such an office, well conducted, must still be of high importance and of immense advantage.

The last book of Scripture, written when the church was in its most settled state, contained epistles addressed to one called *the angel*, whom they address too as an individual, and other circumstances naturally lead the mind to suppose him to have been a single superintending minister. It is evident that at Ephesus there was more than one presbyter ; (Acts xx. 17.) and that the angel or superintending minister had exercised a judgment over others who pretended to be apostles. Rev. ii. 2. This appears then a strong confirmation of the fact of a single superior minister, call him by what name we please, presiding over others, at least in meetings of the clergy. This has been allowed by candid Presbyterians.*

At the same time it cannot be considered as a point so clearly revealed, as that Christians, equally desiring to know and do the will of God, should not, from various circumstances, form different judgments. The author thinks episcopacy scriptural and divinely ordained ; but he dare not say that it is exclusively so, lest he be condemning the churches of Christ in Scotland, Germany, America, and other parts of the world, as well as many, very many pious congregations among other denominations in our own country, (in which there has manifestly and largely been, and still is, vital Christianity in a high degree,) without the clear declaration of the Scriptures against their system.†

* The Author would too far depart from the subject of this Treatise, were he to enter into proofs which might be drawn from the Fathers. Bishop Hall, and Stillingfleet, and Hooker, may be referred to. The genuine Epistles of Ignatius in the beginning of the second centnry, are in the author's mind satisfactory and decisive. There are some valuable observations on this subject in Milner's Church History. See vol. i, page 161, and page 518.

† He enters fully into the observation of the Rev. Basil Woodd—" It has been remarked, that the difference of sentiment which prevails among real Christians, does not respect essential parts of doctrine, hnt other points of a circumstantial kind, and of subordinate importance. Thongh I am not an

It is, however, perfectly clear, and acknowledged on all sides, that God has appointed a distinct order of men for the ministry of the word, and that he by his Spirit, specially calls them to this office. The Reformers insisted much on the divine calling to the work of the ministry. Bishop Jewell says, "They that enter into the ministry, must be allowed, not of men only, but of God. Therefore, whosoever taketh that charge over the people, must look narrowly into himself, and see whether his calling be of God. If he have not a testimony that God has called him inwardly, all other outward calling is of small purpose."

Such being a divine appointment as to a peculiar order of men set apart for the ministry over Christians in general, it is manifestly very important that each should know and fulfil their duties towards each other. This is a large subject, and as it is but incidentally connected with this work, we can only give a few hints upon it.

We will begin with the office of MINISTERS, and here chiefly confine ourselves to the words of Scripture, which are ever remarkable for brevity, fulness, and authority.

Their CHARACTER *must be blameless, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach, not given to wine, no striker, nor greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity. For if a*

Architect, I can distinguish between a scaffold and a building; and though conscientiously preferring episcopal government as most scriptural, I rejoice to think that all these external concerns are but of a temporal nature, and that the various forms of discipline existing in the visible church, are but so many modes, which it pleases the great Head of the Church to permit and employ, in elevating the great spiritual building, composed of living stones, which work completed, the scaffolding will be no longer necessary." The remark of Professor Campbell is also calculated to lead all sides to see that this is not among the great essentials of our common Christianity. He observes, "Nothing can be conceived more absurd in itself, or more contradictory to the declarations of Scripture, than to say that a man's belief and obedience of the gospel, however genuine the one, and however sincere the other, are of no significancy unless he has received his information of the gospel, or been initiated into the Church by a proper minister. Into this absurdity those run who make the truth of God's promises depend on circumstantials no where referred to or mentioned in these promises." Archbishop Grindal considered the Presbyterian Ordination in Scotland, as laudable and valid, and approved, and ratified it. See M'Crie's Life of Knox, vol. i, p. 56.

man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God? Not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the Devil. Moreover, he must have a good report of them that are without, lest he fall into reproach. 1 Tim. iii. 1—7. And again, St. Paul shews that *the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle to all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves, if God, peradventure, will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth.* He is to be *a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate,* (2 Tim. ii. 24, 25,) coveting *no man's silver, or gold, or apparel.* Acts xx. 33.

Their great DUTIES are to give themselves as far as practicable to their ministerial work. *We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.* Acts vi. 4. The directions to them are such as follows—*Take heed unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood.* Acts xx. 28. *Thou, O man of God, follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness; fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.* 1 Tim. vi. 11, 12. *Give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine; neglect not the gift that is in thee. Be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.* 1 Tim. iv. 12—14.

Their more direct ministerial duties are thus laid down. They are to determine *to know nothing among* their hearers, *but Jesus Christ and him crucified.* 1 Cor. ii. 2. To *preach* Christ, *warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that* they *may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.* Col. i. 28. *To feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind. neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.* 1 Pet. v. 2, 3. They are solemnly charged *before the Lord, that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the*

subverting of the hearers. To each it is said, *Preach the word, be instant, in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine, in all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works; in doctrine shewing uncorruptness; gravity, sincerity, sound speech cannot be condemned, that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.* Titus ii. 1, 7, 8. The mode of preparing his discourses is described, Eccles. xii. 9. *Because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs. The preacher sought to find out acceptable words, and that which was written was upright, even words of truth.*

Their REWARD is not small. *When the chief shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.* 1 Pet. v. 4. *He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me.* Matt. x. 40. *Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all his goods.* Matt. xxiv. 45—47.

Their PUNISHMENT for neglected duty will be aggravated. *Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel, therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say to the wicked, Thou shalt surely die, and thou givest them not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way to save his life, the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thine hand.* Ezek. iii. 17, 18. *There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.* 2 Pet. ii. 1. *Woe unto them . . . . wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.* Jude, 11—13.

Such is the scriptural account of the situation and duties of ministers. O that it may be written on every minister's heart, and influence his whole life! How contrary is all

this to a worldly, trifling, gay, and easy life ;* to a mere taste for elegance and literature ; and still more to a covetous, preferment-seeking, or flattering spirit ! to a proud, self-exalting, lordly carriage over the flock of Christ ! How diligent should we be in preaching, how full of zeal in our labours.†

The Holy Spirit can make all that minister in holy things faithful teachers. O that his grace may largely descend upon them ! Bingham has noticed that "The primitive teachers acknowledged their dependance on the Holy Spirit." Chrysostom says in one place, "that he expected the grace of the Spirit to sound in his mind ;" in another, "I do not think that I spake those words of myself, but God who foresaw what would happen, put those words into my mind :" And, speaking of the preaching of Flavian, he says, "It was not human thought that poured forth his discourse, but the grace of the Holy Spirit : as it was not the nature of the vine, but the power of Christ, that made the water wine." St. Austin also often speaks of such assistances of the Spirit in preaching ; and especially urges prayer for this end.

There is much reciprocation between ministers and people : a good minister will, in a course of years, raise up good people around him. A minister praying for his people, will find them praying for him. A preacher steadily and faithfully ministering among his people, will find it a help to their steady attendance upon him. Party

* The Episcopal Church in America has strongly expressed its sentiments on this subject. At the Eighth Annual Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the state of Ohio, held June 3rd, 1825, after stating that "the practice of mixing in the fashionable amusements of the world is inconsistent with the principles of Christianity, and has a direct tendency to check the progress of vital religion," it was resolved, "as the sentence of the Convention, that it be earnestly recommended to the Members of the Church, to abstain from frequenting Balls, and other places of vain amusements, and that they likewise use their influence with their families and dependants, to induce them to abandon such practices."

† The neglect of preaching the trnth is one of the greatest injnries to our church. Dr. Buchanan observes, "If she is to be saved from the evils that threaten her, she will be saved under God by PREACHING, not by acts of legislation, not by volumes from the press in her defence, but by the means which God has been pleased to honour in every age, and which are called in Scripture, the *foolishness of preaching*." 1 Cor. i. 21.

or controversial preachers will make party or controversial hearers. The fruit springing up will be according to the seed sown. O how important that we manifest a right spirit, and sow the right seed among our hearers!

But all faithful ministers must expect opposition, contempt, and ill usage. *The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you.* John xv. 20. They will turn all to good account. The very sins of those who abuse the Gospel, and the false doctrines of those who pervert it, enable ministers more fully to state the clear and full truth in all its parts. The spirit also in which ministers meet improper conduct in their hearers will often help to remedy or remove it. An attendant on an eminent minister began to think he got no good from his ministry, and became lax in his attendance. Complaining to a friend that he could not profit by what he heard, he was advised to go to his minister and converse with him. He did so; and after some conversation, explicitly told him that he found no profit under his ministry. The minister with great humility said, "I am not surprised at it. My only wonder is, that any human being should have been profited by such a poor ministry as mine is." This humble declaration at once overcame the hearer. He saw his own error. The veil over his own eyes was removed, and, bursting into tears, he said, "O sir, it is all my own fault; I have been getting worldly and neglecting prayer, and that is the whole reason why I have not profited."

But we must not enlarge: there are important duties belonging to HEARERS; and as this is a day in which, from the peculiar circumstances of our times, the free character of our constitution, and the liberty of speaking and acting which we all enjoy, these duties are considerably disregarded, it may be desirable, in the spirit of love, to enter at some length into the duties of Christian congregations and Christian people toward their ministers.

The subject may be considered with reference to the duties owing generally by Christians to their ministers,

and to those which are more especially owing by members of the established church to their regularly-appointed pastor.

There are many general duties owing to ministers.

1. To HEAR THEM. To attend upon their ministry. If God graciously send his ministers, it is obviously the duty of those around them to hear. We need not enlarge here, as the duty has been sufficiently shewn. But it is not enough considered that this duty is binding in many cases where it is neglected. Ministers should be heard, where it is practicable, by their stated congregations whenever they preach.* But is not attendance upon them often a matter of caprice and momentary feeling? Do not sometimes such conversations arise as these—"Will you go to church this morning?"—"No; "it looks cloudy" —or, "it's foggy"—or, "it is cold"—or, "it is hot"—or, "it rains"—or, "I am tired"—or, "Mr. Such-a-one only preaches—I will stay quietly at home and read a book." This is not right. Such excuses would not be made if a party of friends were to be visited. We allow that there are cases of sickness and delicate health which furnish a sufficient reason for not going under certain circumstances. We allow that very little children cannot be brought without disturbance (though there are advantages in accustoming children from early years to come) and that where they cannot come, some one must stay at home to take care of them; but the case may surely thus be put with fairness, and yet, if so put, how many will it condemn—that no impediment is a satisfactory objection which is not also found a sufficient impediment to keep you from taking those pleasures which require similar efforts. It is very discouraging to a faithful minister, to see empty pews and

* It is noticed of the excellent Sir John Barnard, Lord Mayor of London, six times chosen Member for the City, and called the ornament of the human race, that he constantly attended twice every Lord's day to pay honour to his Maker in the great congregation, where he behaved with exemplary seriousness, hearing the preacher (though his inferior in knowledge of divinity, no less than in strength of intellect,) with evident signs of meekness on his countenance, and reverence for a mode of religious instruction appointed from above.

a thin, scattered congregation. At other times, such remarks as these are made—"There is an eminent preacher to occupy such a pulpit—there is something peculiar in such a place of worship; let us go there!" The being absent whenever a stranger is to be heard, does not shew steadiness of Christian character. Times may be commonly taken for hearing strangers which do not interfere with regular (we should not say undeviating) attendance on a stated minister, or at a stated place. Roving about among Christians, more than quite staying away, seems to be the prevailing evil. *Regular* hearing at stated places is of great importance; but there are those who err on the other side; they are always hearing, running after different preachers, and that to the neglect of duties. They have been compared to Pharaoh's lean cattle—always eating, but still ill-favoured. *Patient* hearing is another part of the same duty; we see tokens of impatience when persons are turning round to look at the clock, or are manifestly restless during the sermon, or hastening out before the blessing.

To esteem them. Are not ministers, even when good men, sometimes slighted and neglected, not only by the ignorant and rude, but by those who from their situation in life should know better? If ministers do not happen to have commanding or popular talents, or great learning, or private property, they are put in the back ground and little valued. How contrary is this to the express direction of Holy Scripture!—*We beseech you, brethren, to know them who labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.* 1 Thess. v. 12, 13. Surely the very circumstances of a man's having fewer worldly commendations will only be another argument with a generous and Christian mind for more special courtesy and attention. Is he a humble, patient, self-denying, faithful labourer? *receive him in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such in reputation.* Is he defective in any point? remember his office, and you will act towards him as you would in

the case of the failings of a revered parent. Even St. Paul had defects ; and it is recorded in honour of the Galatians, *Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the Gospel unto you at the first ; and my temptation, which was in my flesh, ye despised not, nor rejected.* Gal. iv. 13, 14. It must indeed be allowed that the worldliness of some ministers, and the extravagant height to which others, seeking their own glory only, have advanced the ministerial pretensions, have brought contempt on ministers in general ; but we should distinguish between the office, and the men. It must also be admitted, that some esteem the minister whom they usually hear too highly, so that if another minister happen to preach they are displeased, and will hardly hear him, thinking that they cannot profit by a stranger,* While we allow the benefit of a regular ministry, we must not limit God to one instrument, lest we provoke him to withhold the divine blessing which alone enriches the soul. But with these admonitions, still ministers in circumscribed spheres are frequently treated as inferiors, as idle persons who have plenty of time, and may be made to wait. Now as they are generally men of education, of study, and of devotion, so they have a quick sensibility of feeling ; there is a refinement of mind which is deeply pained by improper conduct. Those offend against this who praise them to their face ; who find fault with them harshly and severely ; who bring rudely before them painful and unwelcome things that they know they cannot remedy ; or treat them with an offensive familiarity. *Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father.* 1 Tim. v. 1.

It is a very important part of this esteem not to listen to, or catch up, foolish, silly, scandalous tales, which are always afloat respecting any public character, and almost invariably originate in gross mistake, if not in entire false-

* The celebrated Dr. Owen had been for nearly five years harassed by fears and temptations, and going to Aldermanbury Church to hear Mr. Calamy, found that he did not preach that day. Many disappointed at not hearing their favorite minister went away, he stayed ; the sermon was on the text. *Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith,* and it was the means of relieving his mind, and first opening the way to his future usefulness.—*Orme's Life,* p. 20.

hood. It is very injurious to propagate such things; and persons who do so are often unconscious how materially they may impair the effects of ministerial labours. The scriptural rule is, *Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.* 1 Tim. v. 19. It is never expedient to give way to tittle-tattle, even about a minister's real imprudencies and defects. Preachers are *men of like passions* with others, and must not be expected to be angels. What if in despising the vessel you should lose all the treasure which it contains! James v. 17. Form reasonable expectations respecting them. Do not think too much of them on the one hand; nor, on the other, expect too much time and attention from them. Ministers have a great work; their studies call justly for much time. Do not then be disappointed if they do not visit you; and do not waste their time and take up the valuable moments which belong to their studies by needless visits, nor by prolonging necessary intercourse. Some will pretend to come for advice, when it is manifest that they have made up their minds before they go. Is there not in many of these things a want of sympathy with them in their arduous work? Yet let it be gratefully acknowledged by every minister, that there are those who are his daily *joy* and *crown.*

3. To OBEY THEM. Whatever they require, from God's word, comes with additional force and obligation, from its having been brought before us by his appointed minister. *He that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God.* The express directions of Scripture on this point are very plain. *Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief, for that is unprofitable for you.* Heb. xiii. 17. There is a laxity of sentiment on this point which was unknown to the primitive church, and it evidences a wrong state of feeling, and is seriously prejudicial to the soul. Do not even good men sometimes speak and act as if the Scriptures had not enjoined such duties as we have recited, and as if they were

wholly independent? True it is, ministers must not be obeyed against or beyond the written word; and true it is that we must judge for ourselves as to the principles of divine truth from that word, as the only ultimate reference: and we may differ from them in various particulars, and yet, differing with reluctance and prayer, still hear aright: but do not many think little or nothing of the obligation of obedience, where the minister's instruction is supported by and founded on the word of God, and all his aim to make them conformable to that word? We shall have occasion to dwell further on this subject in another part of this work.

4. To PROVIDE FOR THEM, is another duty of hearers towards their ministers. The Apostle Paul, who could the more easily speak on this point to those churches among whom he *used none of these things*, writes very decidedly on this point, and that at considerable length. 1 Cor. ix. 7—25. He declares, *So hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel;* and expressly tells the Thessalonians, *Let him that is taught in the word communicate to him that teacheth in all good things.* Now, not to speak of the frauds and keeping back of just dues in tithes, by which many ministers are yearly robbed of that which is their right according to the laws of the land, it is evident, that if these scriptural precepts were duly regarded, we should not have many ministers in frequent difficulties for a maintenance, and others so scantily provided for, that, had they not private property, or other means besides the produce of their ministry, they and their families would actually want bread. In such a case as a late distinguished author, labouring as he did in such a city as London, and so scantily provided for as he was by those among whom he laboured, there manifestly was not the communicating *in all good things* of which the Apostle speaks, to the extent that there ought to have been.*

* Many curates in humble circumstances, and others, from want of information, are often without really valuable books. The Author has known some excellent individuals in the higher classes, who have been eminently use-

5. To PRAY FOR THEM, is a still more important duty, and greatly pressed upon hearers by the sacred writers. How urgent the most successful of all ministers, St. Paul, is on this point—*Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, even as it is with you.* 2 Thess. iii. 1. And again, *Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me.* Rom. xv. 30. And again, *praying always, . . . and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the Gospel.* Eph. vi. 18, 19. There is hardly an Epistle without a request of this kind : (2 Cor. i. 11 ; Col. iv. 3 ; 1 Thess. v. 25.) a request that, coming from an inspired Apostle, in a letter to be the directory of the church in future ages, comes with all the sanctions of a divine precept to Christians in every age. Here then is a point of vast magnitude, both with regard to the usefulness of ministers, and the edification and comfort of their hearers. How often have you prayed for your minister ? Does this come in every day's prayer ? Can you expect to derive profit from his ministry without this spirit of prayer ? Ministers are but God's instruments. It is not their genius, talent, or learning that will convert your soul ; nor their deficiencies in these that will hinder your conversion ; it is not their wisdom and piety that will save you ; they are only the channels of good ; the Spring-Head is above. Oh ! by faith and prayer for your minister, open the foundations of that unfathomable and exhaustless fulness, that may ever flow, replenishing your ministers, and descending in rich abundance to your own soul. The union of prayer in families and in social meetings is here specially important. Is the minister pious ? what a help to his labours ! Is he otherwise ?

ful by gifts of works calculated to give their minister the best help—such as Richmond's Fathers of the English Church, Scott's Bible, Milner's Church History, Simeon's Skeletons, or Horæ Homileticæ ; or lesser works, as Biddulph's Essays on the Liturgy, Scott's Life, Wilberforce's Practical View, Baxter's Reformed Pastor, &c. &c. Such gifts have been abundantly repaid in he increased usefulness of their pastor.

what a means of making him all that it is desirable he should be!

We have now to consider those DUTIES which are more especially OWING BY MEMBERS OF THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH TO THEIR REGULARLY-APPOINTED PASTOR.

In considering these, it may be first expedient to shew THE IMPORTANCE OF AN ESTABLISHMENT.

When we look at the public establishment of religion among the Jews, and the blessing of God on the labours of such kings as David, Hezekiah, and others, who maintained that establishment, we cannot but think that it is right and scriptural for the government of a country to establish and maintain the Christian Religion in that form in which they conscientiously receive it. It appears nothing more than using the talent of influence and power which God has entrusted to them for the glory of his name. It is both a wise and a Christian course to maintain the form which they and the greater part of the community approve as most conformable to the Scriptures, and to tolerate all others, consistent with good order and peace: the wisest governments have ever respected the rights of conscience.* The Scripture contains promises that most expressly shew that governments shall maintain and support the Christian Church—*Kings shall be thy nursing-fathers, and their Queens thy nursing-mothers—Kings shall minister unto thee —Thou shalt suck the breasts of kings*, and the like. The provision made in this country for the established Church of England, seems but the fulfilling of these promises.

Looking at it in this view, what a noble provision did the piety of our ancestors, and the zeal of Christians of former days, make for the spiritual wants of the people! The whole country is divided into parishes, and a church is erected, and a ministry provided in each parish.

Then, what care has been taken to preserve the purity of this church! The minister who is appointed to an holy office has to answer the most solemn questions before he

* Locke's Letters on Toleration, published in 1689, established the important principle of toleration.

is ordained. He has in the presence of God and the congregation to declare his determination by the help of the Lord to lay aside the study of the world, and of the flesh, and to give all faithful diligence to know and teach the word of God. A Liturgy full of devout and admirable prayers is provided to assist us in public worship, and in the course of that Liturgy nearly the whole word of God is read once a year, and the most important part thrice a year. There is a spring of revival and restoration to first purity in these things of which the English Church has often found, and is now experiencing the benefit. In no church perhaps in the world is so much of the Holy Scriptures read, and all this is in general provided for by the government of our country, through the piety of our ancestors, without any expense to ourselves.

What an immense help is all this to the faithful ministry of the word! It places ministers at once on the most desirable vantage-ground for declaring the truth: and it is a farther advantage of ministers in the Establishment, that they are ordinarily independent of their flocks in point of provision. This has been felt and acknowledged by ministers of other communions: for though in many cases the provision is quite insufficient, and in others the security of the income may be abused to foster indolence, yet the system frees ministers from many temptations to partiality and selfishness in the discharge of their sacred duties; and when zealous, their conduct being manifestly above worldly motives, has greater influence. The people have divine ordinances also brought near to them. Sherlock, in his Treatise on Religious Assemblies, observes, "To enjoy the liberty of public worship near our own dwellings, without being forced to seek for it at a distance, would have been thought a great privilege in former ages, like the heavenly manna falling round about the tents of the true Israelites. Neighbours, members of one congregation, living near to each other, and conversing often together, may attain many important ends of Christian communion, and have many advantages for strengthening, exhorting, reproving,

and watching over each other. It is a great help also to the good government of families. When the children, and servants, and inmates go to the same place with the head of the family, he knows that they are there, and they are encouraged and quickened by his example."

It has been objected to the Establishment, that the patronage to livings is generally in such hands, that it is not probable that pious and suitable men will be placed in them, but much more likely that eager, worldly, and ambitious men, who stoop to flatter others, will obtain what retired and more deserving men lose. Patronage is a talent of immense responsibility ; and we would rather excite a spirit of prayer for those to whom it is entrusted, than reproach those who abuse it. But we need not enter into a consideration of the way in which it is sometimes exercised : or notice the sins of the people, as one cause why God may permit it to be ill exercised ; or remark, that the property on which patronage was originally in most cases founded, was a voluntary contribution to the church by private individuals, and ask, Was it not reasonable that they who paid the expense should choose the Teacher ? or can those who gratuitously obtain the benefit justly complaiu ? Let us remember that, in fact, no human scheme is without considerable difficulties ; nor can any plan be devised by man for securing in perpetuity an unexceptionable administration or a constant succession of able and pious ministers to the same place. The Churches of Geneva have declined from the Gospel ; the once Presbyterian places of worship, in various parts of our own country, have become Arian or Socinian ; and it has been abundantly seen, that every human device has fallen short of fully attaining the desired result. Are we then left without remedy ? As it regards man's help, we are often left without remedy ; and it is needful and profitable to feel this, to wean us from man and his wisdom and contrivances, and lead us more simply to God. We are not left without remedy in him. He only raises up pious Ministers : He only governs all minds, so that such Min-

isters labour just where it pleases Him. He has the key of David; he opens, and no man shuts; and shuts, and no man opens. We believe from experience, that the Holy Spirit never stirred up two or three constantly and perseveringly to meet together many years, and ask of God for faithful Ministers, without in the result obtaining the blessing to the place for which they prayed. Here is the only effective, here is the full remedy for the evil; *cease ye from man, trust in Jehovah.*

It is not a sufficient objection therefore to the obvious benefits of an Establishment to say, that many ministers are unfaithful to their sacred engagements. The maladministration of an institution by no means proves that the institution is wrong, for there is no institution that is not exposed, in our fallen world, to this evil; only the more excellent the institution is, the greater guilt lies on those, who, by ministering unworthily, bring upon it unmerited reproach.

Nor is it a sufficient objection to say that 'a minister is forced upon me, and I have no choice.' There can hardly be a single congregation where some might not hold this language. There are a thousand circumstances in which you have been placed without your own choice; your parents, your birth, your native place, your education, your situation, and a variety of other things, have been fixed, more or less, without your option. You are not responsible for God's providence, but for the right improvement of such advantages as he has graciously afforded you.

The grand remedy for these and similar evils, and for any imagined and real defects in the Liturgy,* is not any

* Mr. Scott remarks with great candour, "I believe there are many things unscriptural among us all; that is, either defective, redundant, or erroneous: but human nature is very fallible; ten thousand circumstances produce prejudices which warp the judgment; and the Lord seems to illuminate his people but in part. There must therefore be differences of opinion: these our corrupt passions will magnify into matters of importance; but when we are satisfied in our minds as far as circumstances will admit, that we are in the place, and worshipping after the manner that it is the will of God we should, we are not vainly to imagine that we can do much more, or that we can remove rocks and mountains, for it would be no less a work, if we could bring the state of a church, even in our own neighbourhood, from what ages have confirmed, to what we think right, and at last, we are as liable to be preju-

particular constitution that individuals may think to be altogether immaculate, but an enlarged spirit of prayer for the plenteous effusion of the Holy Spirit on the whole church, and each individual branch of it. The Holy Ghost only sends faithful ministers to any church ; and while men are looking merely at human agency, and disregarding His special office, how can their designs prosper ? But let the more serious members of any church unite in prayer for this particular object, and they may fully expect that faithful labourers will be raised up, by whatever human agents ministers may be appointed over us. And so, whatever may be the minor defects of our Evangelical Liturgy, let the Spirit of grace and supplication be in our own hearts, and those defects will be lost in the edification and comfort we shall receive in those devout and holy prayers with which the Liturgy abounds.

What a recommendation it is of the Established Church of this country, that martyrs were its founders, and some of the best practical divines have ministered at its sanctuary ! With such men as Cranmer, Latimer, Ridley, Bradford, and Hooper laying its plan, and such men as Hall, Davenant, Reynolds, Hopkins, Beveridge, and Leighton, among its prelates ; with Lord Burleigh, Bacon, Boyle, Newton, Addison, and Johnson, and an innumerable host of wise, powerful, learned, and enlarged minds among its members, and with the test of continuance for three centuries, the Church of England is surrounded with a glory and honour that may well claim the respectful attention of all Christians, and the affectionate veneration of all its members.

Observe the obvious blessings that have followed in the train of this establishment. Apart from its highest bless-

diced and to mistake as other men." He elsewhere declares, "A minister may officiate and labour in the establishment conscientiously and usefully, without being required to do any thing which he regards as unlawful; that is, with the views which I have of Christianity, and of the ministry," and speaks of being reconciled to the assent and consent to the whole of the prayer book, required of ministers instituted to benefices, "by the consideration that it by no means is supposed to imply putting the prayer book on the footing of the Bible, and by reflecting that many things are wrong every where."—See his Letters.

ing, that of being a branch of the visible church in which innumerable immortal beings have been born again, made members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven, it has diffused, among all ranks and classes, a knowledge of the leading truths of revelation. It has been a bulwark, a constant standard of divine truth, and a rallying point for faithful ministers. It has been thus instrumental in maintaining a spirit of piety through our country, which has exalted our nation above every other, and made Britain the glory of all lands. Even those who dissent from it, are infinitely indebted to it, and pious ministers among them have readily acknowledged, that wherever piety flourishes in the Church, there the piety of Dissenters is quickened. By the mild and tolerant spirit breathed in its devotions, and professed in its Articles, a spirit of toleration is diffused through the land, and an unexampled liberty of conscience and worship prevails among us. Who can tell what would be the state of things in these respects, if the Roman Catholic, or any more exclusive and less tolerant system had the same pre-eminence ?

In these things we may see something of the importance and beneficial influence of the established church.* The maintenance and support of such an establishment is a most serious duty.

We address not members of other denominations. We fully admit that there are very many truly pious and conscientious Dissenters ; we rejoice at the good doing among them, and by them ; we pray that they may receive yet

* The Author has not attempted to enter at large into the subject. Those who wish for further information will find it in Jewell's Works, especially his Apology and the Defences of it ; Strype's Memorials, Annals, and Lives of the Reformers ; Whitgift's Answer and Defence against Cartwright ; Fulke's and Bilson's Treatises, Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity ; the writings of Bishops Hall, Hopkins, and Beveridge ; of Stillingfleet, John Rogers, Maddox, Warren, Comber, Bennet, Nichols, and many others. The Tracts of the Bristol Church of England Tract Society, Wilks's Correlative Claims, the Scholar armed, a Tract by Robinson, entitled a Serious Call, &c., and a Pamphlet entitled, The Evil of Separation from the Church of England, will be found useful to those who cannot procure more scarce or expensive works. In Milner's Church History, there are many valuable remarks on this subject. See especially vol. ii, ch. 17. See also Chalmers on Endowments.

more abundantly the gifts of the Holy Spirit; and we admire and would reciprocally adopt the words of one of their own devoted ministers—"I feel a most sincere and encouraging joy in the growing number and holy eminence of those among you whom the world stigmatizes, and it is my heart's desire and prayer, that whatever may be unscriptural in all established and other churches, may not be brushed off by rude hands, or broken away by outward violence, but detected, to the conviction of upright hearts, by the light and grace of the Lord Jesus in his word, and purged away by the sweet and omnipotent influences of the Holy Spirit."

We are not now, however, speaking to Christians in general: nor do we address those members of the church who merely are such from state policy: nor those in authority, and with church patronage, who merely consult their family interests, and appoint unfit, wholly unfit men, because they happen to be related to them: nor those who being themselves prejudiced against the real principles of the established church, harass every minister who holds them, and throw all their influence and patronage towards the appointment of men of a worldly spirit, and thus bring all sorts of obloquy and reproach against the church.* Mr. Yates in his able pamphlet, "The Church in Danger," has shewn the practical wisdom of appointing pious, indefatigable, and exemplary ministers, in the case of two churches in London, a few years back almost empty, and both of them since attended by crowded congregations. He says, "The appointment of these two Rectors to the situations for which they have approved themselves so appropriately qualified, has more augmented the number of advocates, and more contributed to the support of the church of England, than all the controversies and defences of its doctrines, or all the legislative enforcements of its discipline, that have appeared during the last half century." How prejudicial to the real prosperity of the church is a contrary course! The instances have not been few in

* See Chalmers' valuable Essay on Church Patronage.

which, when a faithful minister has died, or has perhaps even been driven away, his place is immediately supplied by one of another spirit, and dissenting chapels have forthwith been erected and filled; and a lasting breach and division made: made primarily by this course of proceeding in those who profess to be wise and intelligent members of the church of England! What extended evil such conduct produces! what wide-spreading and lasting injury is done to the Establishment! and what a tremendous responsibility rests on such persons!

But we ADDRESS PIOUS AND ENLIGHTENED CHURCHMEN, in private stations, on points which tend to weaken the influence and extent of that Establishment, which has been such a blessing to the country, and we exhort them so to act as to MAINTAIN THIS BLESSING, and hand it down unimpaired to their children and their children's children.

The great difficulty with hearers from the beginning, has been their liking or disliking of individuals; their partialities for one and against another. *Every one of you saith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ*, was the complaint of an Apostle, which he strongly repels—*Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you?* and shews them that all mere men are nothing *but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man.* So it is now. If their own minister pleases the members of a congregation, they are often so partial and attached to him, as to hear no one else with patience. If they entertain a dislike to him, they cherish it, and manifest it far too strongly. If any new preacher of peculiar talent comes, there are those who are far too eager to run after him;" *

* The late Mr. Robinson in his Serious Call, observed, "those *professing godliness* have forgotten what they owe to their faithful pastors, and no longer yield them what is their due—attention, reverence, and attachment. The relation which formerly subsisted between the parochial minister and the people of his charge, and which is calculated to promote the interests of solid piety, is now nearly dissolved through the wildness of insubordination, which has broken loose among us. A contempt is shown for the sacred function, and for the most exemplary characters invested with it. In many cases at least, no eminence of ability, no fidelity or diligence, no purity of doctrine, or holiness of life in the Parish Priest, have been sufficient to secure to him the affections, even of the more serious part of his congregation; but they have departed from him in multitudes, on the appearance of a strange

and others are, to a lamentable degree, wanderers, roving from place to place.

To such, as Christians, we say—Beware of leaning on an arm of flesh, of trusting in man, or of glorying in man. To such, as members of the Established Church, we say—It is the very essence of the Church of England to commit the charge of a certain district to a certain minister : he to look after it, and the people within it to look up to him. We have seen the benefits of the Church, and approve of its constitution ; but no benefits can be obtained without some sacrifice of private inclination ; and are we not acting in the spirit of those who separate from it, when we go where we please, and choose our own minister, without reference to the appointments of that church ? Is not in this way the system of the Church of England breaking down among us, and that of the Dissenters extensively superseding it, even within the church ? Do parishioners in large towns in general feel any connection with their minister, the more for his being their parochial pastor ? Many certainly by their conduct manifest that they do not ; and thus with them, all those good sentiments which used formerly to be of so much and such valuable influence, of the obligation to attend the parish church, are rapidly passing away. We may justly allow that these sentiments were carried by some to an extreme, so as to militate against some of the first principles of the Reformation ; but are we not now in danger on quite the other side ?

The author feels the delicacy and difficulty of the subject. The Scriptures very much insist on the duty of guarding against false teachers ; we need only refer to the following passages—Deut. xiii. 1—3 ; Prov. xix. 27 ; Isa. ix. 15, 16 ; Jer. xiv. 14—16 ; Ezek. iii. 16—22 ; Micah iii. 5—7 ; Matt. vii. 15—24 ; xxiii. 4, 5 ; xxiv. 24 ; 2 Peter ii. 1—3 ; 1 John iv. 1. to prove this. With so many direc-

teacher, whose endeavours, as it afterwards appeared, were to unsettle and divide. Is this to obey the Apostolical directions? I Thess. v. 12, 13; Heb. xiii. 17. O beware that you do not weaken the hands, and grieve the hearts of those whom God is pleased to own in the work of the ministry, and who have a just claim on you for your firm support, and unremitted co-operation."

tions and cautions on this point, and with the affecting warning, that *if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the pit;* and with the important fact that we owe the Reformation to an appeal to the word of God, from false teachers who had been regularly appointed, and who held official situations; we dare not but insist on and press the duty of every Christian's trying the doctrine which he hears, by the written word, and being anxious to hear pure and scriptural doctrine. We by no means plead for an external and human system of order to the neglect of hearing the truth. Christians have certainly a right of private judgment, and are charged *to take heed what* they *hear.* Mark iv. 24. While they are told, *Despise not prophesyings,* they are also told, *Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.* 1 Thess. v. 21, 22. They are exhorted, *Believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world.* 1 John iv. 1. "This shews," says Mr. Scott, "that Christians who are well acquainted with the Scriptures, may, in humble dependence on divine teaching, know for themselves who it is that preaches according to the doctrine of the Apostles, and who contradicts it, and that they are bound to make this trial of men and their tenets." This seems very justly to mark some limitations of private judgment. But is there not sometimes a passing beyond this, and an enquiry not merely—Is my parish minister a man of God, well *instructed in the way of the Lord?* but, "Is he most to my taste, and the most interesting, (not to say amusing) that I can reach?" We would only put this subject before the consciences of our readers, for their own consideration; yet bearing in mind that there are cases of relationship, connection, particular friendship, or other circumstances of a strong kind, that may justly claim exemption from a common rule.

It must be considered, that though it is the duty of those to whom the power is committed, to appoint faithful, and to remove unworthy ministers, for the due discharge of which they will have to render strict account: yet the

efficacy of a divine ordinance does not rest with the minister. Matt. xxiii. 2, 3. In the Old Testament we find that a whole tribe, that of Levi, was appointed for holy duties. In the New Testament, we see that our Lord sent Judas himself to preach the Gospel. Matt. x. 4. Bishop Beveridge justly observes, " Whether the minister be worthy or unworthy, it is still by the grace of Christ that his ordinances are made effectual. If Christ be pleased to withhold his grace, be the minister never so worthy, it cannot be obtained ; and if Christ be pleased to convey his grace, be the minister never so unworthy, it cannot be hindered. So that he that receives grace from an ordinance, must not thank the minister for his worthiness, but Christ for his goodness : and he that receives no grace, must not blame the unworthiness of the minister, but the faithlessness of his own heart : for be the minister worthy or unworthy, if I come with faith *to* an ordinance, I am sure to go with grace *from* it." *

This has been the sentiment of Christian writers in early ages. Augustine, in his Treatise against the Donatists, shews at some length, that though the ministers were guilty of the crime laid to their charge, yet that was not a sufficient ground of separation from the church, and that the church did not cease to be a church because it communicated with wicked men, since either she did not know them, or else she bore with them to preserve peace. He affirms that there was always in the church chaff and corn, that is, both good and wicked men ; and that such will be to the day of judgment, which shall divide the good from the bad : that sometimes the number of the latter exceeds that of the former ; that many cannot be driven out of the

* See his Exposition of the Twenty-sixth Article.

Cobbett, in his Treatise on Prayer, urges the same sentiment—" Christ authorized the Twelve Disciples, and Judas among the rest, to preach the Gospel ; (Matt. x. 4. 7.) and so as that if they came to those that were worthy, their peace was to come upon them, even all kind of bliss to their souls. Let the preacher be unworthy himself, yet, if the hearers be worthy, their peace comes on them. The Gospel and Gospel Ordinances are the power of God to salvation to the believing hearer and partaker, be the minister regenerate or unregenerate.'

church because they are not known, and because it is convenient to tolerate some for quietness' sake, to prevent a schism which might be occasioned by cutting off from the communion those persons who might draw along with them several of the faithful."

In general, it may be said, Christians are sufficiently aware of the right of private judgment; but we fear that they are not aware of their obligations, as members of a particular church, to the appointed ministers connected with that church. There are, it is true, very trying cases, as there must be in so many thousand parishes, and among sixteen thousand ministers. Nor is it a matter of indifference what we hear. Truth is the proper nourishment of the soul. If it be mere moral precepts on the one hand, or theoretical notions on the other, it is not Christianity. The native appetite of the new-born soul is for Christian truth; pure, scriptural truth, in all its parts, both doctrine and precept; and this it must have. As David, when hungry, ate the shew-bread, so the hungry soul must have truth. Preaching the word is God's ordinance: but if it be not his word, but human notions and inventions that are preached, it ceases to be an ordinance of God. If there be a well of brackish and bad water in my own yard, and a good well in a neighbour's, I am glad to get water at his well. Yet, on the other hand, there must be a limitation, a wise limitation to the right of private judgment; and we should ask ourselves, How much judgment have I to use? We come to hear as learners, and not as judges.

Taking these things into consideration, let us endeavour to illustrate the subject by various practical cases that occur.

Suppose, first, the worst case. The minister is UNFAITHFUL IN HIS SERMONS, AND IMMORAL IN HIS CONDUCT. He preaches not Christ, and yet is full *of envy and strife.* Phil. i. 15. Here, even, enquire first how far you are a partaker of his sins: have you attended to the direction, *First cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye?* Matt. vii. 5. If

immoral, have you warned him ? have you reported him to the Ordinary ? * have you taken any steps towards the removal of such a man ? † have you even prayed perseveringly for any length of time for him ? Supposing that you have done your part to rectify so serious an evil, I dare not say that you should attend such an appointed teacher ; I dare not forbid your attendance on a neighbouring pious clergyman. You and yours need to hear the truth. Bishop Jewell (on 1 Thess. v. 13, 14.) says, " What shall we say of them that labour not, that do neither teach, nor exhort, nor reprove, nor correct, that have no care to do their message, and no regard to the people ? what may I say of such ? God himself says, *They are dumb dogs that cannot bark ; that lie and sleep, and delight in sleeping : they all look to their own way, and their own advantage, and every one for his own purpose.* Christ calls them thieves and robbers. They are unsavory salt, profitable for nothing, but to be trodden under feet of men. *Woe is unto me !* says Paul, *if I preach not the Gospel.* Woe to the servant that wraps his talent in a napkin, and increases not his master's gain. God grant such idle and slothful ministers grace to know their office, and do it ; if not, God give the people grace to know them, and to shun them, and to fly from them." But still, do not lose sight of the relation in which yon stand to your parish minister. Respect his office. Shew him all courtesy. Cease not every effort for bringing him to a better mind. God can yet make him a burning and a shining light. If ministers fail in their duty we must not fail in ours. We all pray too little for those we perhaps justly disapprove. We all look too little at our own sins as the cause of our evils.‡

* The *Ordinary* means one who has ordinary or immediate jurisdiction in Ecclesiastical matters in any place. In this sense Archdeacons are Ordinaries: but the word is more frequently applied to the Bishop of the Diocese.

† The Twenty-sixth Article says, " It appertains to the discipline of the Church, that enquiry be made of evil ministers, and that they be accused by those that have knowledge of their offences; and finally, being found guilty, by just judgment be deposed."

‡ Bradford delightfully manifested the true Christian spirit at a time when the Roman Catholic superstitions were again re-established, under Queen Mary, by looking at his own past sins as the cause, and thus humbling him-

Suppose another case: A MINISTER MORAL IN HIS OUTWARD CONDUCT, AND YOU THINK HIM LEGAL, OR ANTINOMIAN: * IGNORANT, OR UNSOUND: UNCHARITABLE, OR CONTROVERSIAL, IN THE GENERAL COURSE OF HIS MINISTRY, AND PERHAPS WORLDLY IN HIS SPIRIT. It may be well again, first to enquire within, and see whether you have good ground for such a judgment, or whether the fault be not in yourself. A legal hearer may condemn a minister for antinomianism, who is only faithfully preaching the gospel of Christ. An Antinomian hearer may condemn a minister for legality, when he is only insisting on practical religion. A man of literature may condemn a preacher for ignorance, because he has not himself studied the Bible. And so with regard to other supposed faults, we should never forget our Lord's question, *Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?* Matt. vii. 3—5. Other circumstances are also to be taken into consideration. In the Established Church we have this immense advantage, that while the prayers are always evangelical

self before God:—"To go to mass, and sacrings, with such like idolatry, I have been a great time more ready than now I am to hear thy word, and use thy sacraments as I should do: thy ministers I pray not for; thy church I am not careful for; no not now, good Lord! when wicked doctrine most prevaileth; idolatry, superstition, and abomination aboundeth; the sacrament and sacrifice of thy dear Son is blasphemously corrupted: when for preaching there is nothing but massing; for catechising censing; for reading of the Scriptures, bell-ringing; for singing of the Psalms and godly songs to our edification, all is done in Latin with such notes, tunes, ditties, and descants, that utterly the mind is pulled from the consideration of the thing (if men did understand it) unto the melody; all which my wickedness has brought in; my profaning of this commandment, and my not praying. Thy ministers are in prison, dispersed in other countries, spoiled, burnt, murdered; many fall for fear of goods, life, name, &c.; from the truth which they have received, unto manifest idolatry; false preachers abound among thy people; thy people, dearly bought even with thy blood, are not fed with the bread of thy word, but with shillings; Antichrist wholly prevaileth, and yet for all this, alas! I am too careless, nothing lamenting my sins which be the cause of all this. O dear Father, forgive me for Christ's sake, and be merciful unto me; and as of thy mercy thou didst give me time to repent, so give me repentance." I cannot but strongly recommend to all my readers, the invaluable writings of this reformer in the sixth volume of the Fathers of the Church.

* The author uses these terms for the sake of brevity; by *legal* is meant, making our own obedience, either in all or in part, the ground why God should confer salvation upon us: by *antinomian*, making the salvation of Christ to consist only in deliverance from the guilt and punishment of sin; and disregarding its invariable and inseparable connection with a holy life, and obedience to the law of God.

and spiritual, a very large proportion of the Holy Scriptures is always read in the public congregation, so that you can never be entirely destitute of the truth. A man's situation may be so leading and prominent, that his defection from the parish church, and going to another church, may materially injure his general usefulness, and cause greater evils than any supposed personal loss. Or a person may be connected with the minister as part of his family, or related to him, or dependant on him. Experience has shewn that the souls of Christians have eminently flourished where they have given up personal advantage and comfort, out of regard to the spirit of unity, and from tender consideration for the feelings of others, and earnest endeavours to do the most good on the whole. Again, there may be no neighbouring church where you may have the advantage of hearing the truth: now with regard to attending worship among other bodies of Christians, the late Mr. Hey justly remarked, "The hearing of a good minister is not the whole of religious duty. To hear regularly, I must become a member of some particular community that may require of me things with which I cannot conscientiously comply; or I may have a large family to educate in some religious persuasion, which may have great weight in the choice of my communion." Let these things at least have their full weight on your mind; consider them in prayer before God; consult experienced Christian friends; and then decide as conscience shall direct.*

If circumstances are such as to call for a choice, as in

* We would not recommend continnance with an erroneous and wicked teacher.

The primitive church clearly held that Christians onght to leave an irregular and profane pastor. Cyprian and the African hishops, lay it down as a rule, "that the people who are ohedient to the Lord's commandments, and fear God, ought to separate from a sinful bishop;" and so Ireneus shews that we ought to separate from heretical hishops, and adhere to those who faithfully kept the apostles' doctrines; and the general Council of Constantinople lays down this rule,—"That whoever separates from such as puhlicly teach heresy in the church, even hefore they are synodically condemned. are not guilty of schism, hut maintain the unity of the church from schisms, by condemning not a hishop, hut a false hishop and a false teacher." See Potter on Church Government, p. 181, 182; and Cyprian's Epistles, Letter 67. Cyprian's arguments are scriptural and weighty.

large parishes where there are many churches ; the choice should be a matter of prayer and deliberation. Especially desire and seek after the faithful, practical, and holy minister, who will do your heart good : who will rouse and quicken, warn and exhort, instruct and build you up in the Gospel of Christ. God knows your exact state ; look to him for guidance ; and when you have fixed, REGULARLY ATTEND. Mr. Newton remarks, " Unsettled hearers seldom thrive : they usually grow wise in their own conceits, have their heads filled with notions, acquire a dry, critical, and censorious spirit, and are more intent upon disputing who is the best preacher, than upon obtaining benefit to themselves from what they hear."

Suppose again a minister FAITHFUL, but UNTALENTED, dull, and perhaps tedious : still, what is the state of your own heart ? Do you say, There is one in a neighbouring parish, or in a dissenting meeting, who interests you more : but your own parish minister allowedly preaches the truth : Attend him, then, and look more simply to the Lord for his blessing. Remember the general benefits of order and of the established church. Sacrifice something of taste and feeling for the general good. The spirit of wandering is very bad ; it destroys pastoral unity, and cuts up that sympathy which should ever subsist between a minister and his people. Wanderers are not thrivers in the Christian life themselves ; and their examples are injurious to others. Go regularly to one minister, and one place ; and while you are depending on divine teaching, your soul shall flourish under the divine blessing. It has been observed, even by those who dissent from us, " Be sure you do not mistake the true nature of spiritual edification, in thinking that nothing edifies but what either pleases our fancies or raises our sensitive passions. Such qualifications in ministers should be the ground of our choice and esteem, as are truly ministerial, and most adapted to answer the great ends of the ministry ; and after all, we must expect more from it as the ordinance of Christ, than barely the performance of a man, though ever

so wise and skilful, pious and faithful. By overlooking the institution of God, and having, too, raised expectations from man, we provoke him to blast the most promising means. On the contrary, a weaker ministry is often greatly blessed when it is the best persons can conveniently and regularly enjoy, and is attended from a sense of duty to God, in obedience to his commands, and in a dependance on his presence and blessing."

Suppose yet another case—a minister is FAITHFUL IN HIS DOCTRINES, BUT HIS CONDUCT OR HIS TEMPER DOES NOT CORRESPOND TO THEM. It is a case provided for by our Lord, Matt. xxiii. 2, 3 ; *The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat : all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do ; but do not ye after their works, for they say and do not.* St. Paul shewed a conformity to the spirit of this when he said, *Some preach Christ even of envy and strife ; not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds. What then ? notwithstanding every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached, and I do therein rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.* Phil. i. 15—18. Surely, if he rejoiced in their preaching, though their spirit was bad, others might and did hear with advantage what they preached ; though it is not said that he advised attendance on such. There were probably cases of this kind where one would be more reluctant to attend, than when there was less knowledge, but more sanctity of character.

But suppose one case more, that you have the happiness to be in the parish of which the clergyman is A FAITHFUL AND WELL-INSTRUCTED MINISTER OF THE NEW COVENANT. You have here every motive for continuing to hear, and in general such a minister has large and attentive congregations. Yet even here the great enemy is vigilant to hinder the progress of the truth. If such a minister have not popular talents, he will often be slighted. It is also a striking and an affecting fact, that while those who live at a distance make many self-denying efforts, and come in all weathers to hear, those who live in the immediate neighbourhood, and have every advantage and facility,

too often neglect all their privileges, and make some objection or other, to justify themselves in this neglect. O be not fastidious, and slight not your greatest privilege, because it may be easily attained. There is many a soul hungering for the bread of life, that would be filled with joy and gratitude for such means as you neglect. Are you sincere in your profession of attachment to the established church? do not then so act as to weaken and destroy that system which has been so large a blessing to the country.*

But besides hearing the minister, there are in connection with our duties to him, other important things to be attended to, some of which have already been mentioned, and some will be more fully considered hereafter. There is one point more that the present state of the church peculiarly presses on our attention.

Hearers should CO-OPERATE WITH THEIR MINISTER IN HIS VARIOUS PLANS FOR THE GOOD OF THE PARISH, and promoting the religious and benevolent institutions which may have been formed in it. A load of secular business in many places falls on a minister, from which he might be relieved by judicious, educated, and pious laymen. Such men, in schools, in the forwarding of religious societies and the care of their accounts, and in larger parishes in visiting the poor and the sick, might very materially, and do in many cases, very effectively aid their minister. Much more might be done through our country

* There are other cases arising from want of church-room, which in the present state of many parishes, it is impossible to meet; one can only hope that it is an evil which will by degrees be remedied by the measures which happily are now in progress for this purpose under the government. Had the members of the Church of England had greater facilities for erecting places of worship, and a large degree of the patronage of the places which they erect; had they had something of the same facilities which Roman Catholics, Socinians, and every other body of Dissenters have, there would have been an almost infinitely larger body of attached members to that church through the whole country, and there would hardly in any parish have been want of church room, or of zealous ministers to fill the churches. A groundless fear of opening the door to doctrines, merely imagined to be injurious to the establishment, has been one grand cause of the increase of the multiplied bodies of Christians now separated from that establishment. It is most probable that the British parishes were first formed, and British churches first built and endowed, by that system of private benevolence and piety, in lords of manors and others, which some in power seem now above all things to dread as injurious to the establishment.

than is done, by the humble, prudent, and zealous co-operation of laymen. What a mass of ignorance, and darkness, and prejudice, and misery is to be removed from the minds and dwellings of millions, even in favoured England! Two or three individual ministers placed in some cases over ten, twenty, or thirty thousand, or more inhabitants, are utterly inadequate to discharge all that important work which, apart from all temporal, the spiritual interests of so many immortal beings justly requires. It is delightful to see the progress of building fresh churches in all large places, and much will be done by this means. But still much will remain to be done by judicious and pious laymen; while wise and faithful ministers, deeply sensible of the magnitude of the ministerial work, will rejoice to call in such help. Till this be more generally done, the Church of England will not maintain its ground against the indefatigable zeal and ceaseless efforts of members of other communions: nor shall we, as members of that church, duly discharge our duty to God, and the sacred trust which he has committed to us, of maintaining it and handing it down unimpaired to our posterity.

In conclusion, let me address fastidious hearers, and negligent ministers. FASTIDIOUS HEARERS are little sensible of their spiritual privileges in this day, in any part of such a country as this. Think of the state of your forefathers, once wretched idolators: think of the days of popery, when, for professing protestant principles you would have lost your life; think of hundreds of millions still living in pagan darkness; think of the countless numbers whose hearts would overflow with gratitude had they half of your present advantages; and O fear lest in despising them you forfeit them, and be left destitute for ever. You deserve not the advantages which you have, nor are you likely to have more till you be brought to a humble, meek, and lowly state of mind, simply looking to the divine mercy in Christ Jesus for the pardon of your past unprofitableness, and for all requisite supplies for your spiritual necessities.

Nor can we close this chapter without appealing to the consciences of those CLERGYMEN WHO NEGLECT THEIR SACRED DUTIES, live in the world, give way to unholy tempers, or preach mere moral essays, or mere controversial theories. We would say, in a spirit of affectionate concern, See how you distress the minds of your hearers and people, and drive them to that which they cannot, and do not approve! O remember our Lord's solemn warning, peculiarly applicable to you—*Whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offences; for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!* Matt. xviii. 6, 7.

An old writer in the days of Queen Elizabeth uses stronger language, and emphatically says, "Little shall be their comfort in their reckoning who, in their watch-towers, sing sweet songs to sinners, and flatter them in known evils; that suffer them in their swearing, in their gaming, abetting them in their usury, in their sabbath-breaking, in their profane contempt of the doctrines and teachers of grace, warning them of nothing so much as of their being too precise, too forward, and too religious, as the greatest danger and extremity that they can run into. Such watchmen are traitors to the Church of God, and to the souls of men, and no sort of men are more serviceable to the Devil than they are."

The address of Bishop Beveridge to such characters is very striking—"Thou that callest upon others to love God as the best of goods, and to hate sin as the worst of evils, wilt thou hate God as if he was the worst of evils, and love sin as if it was the best of goods? Thou that preachest to others to leave the world and follow Christ, wilt thou leave Christ to follow the world? Thou that preachest a man should desire God above all things, wilt thou desire all things above God? Thou that criest to others, *Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?* what! wilt thou rather die than turn? Thou that sayest, Covetousness is idolatry,

and drunkenness bestiality, wilt thou fall down to the one, and make a beast of thyself with the other? Thou that shewest others the way that leads from hell to heaven, wilt thou thyself go the way that leads from heaven to hell? Thou that warnest others to beware of misery, and to labour after glory, wilt thou neglect that glory and cast thyself headlong into misery? And thou that holdest the door open to others, wilt thou shut it upon thyself? Certainly it is the greatest aggravation in the world that any sin can be invested withal, even to have it committed by one whose office and work it is to destroy it—he cannot fall but he draws many after him." *

* See Beveridge's Exposition of the Thirty-nine Articles. Article 26.

CHAPTER VII.

DIRECTIONS FOR HEARING THE WORD.

THE subjects of the Christian ministry are truths of immense moment. Our total ruin by nature, our awful danger, our utter inability to help ourselves, the astonishing love of the Almighty in giving his Son to die for sinners, the free and full salvation provided for the guilty, deliverance from the divine wrath, with its tremendous issue in eternal ruin, and restoration to peace with God, to holiness, to eternal life and glory ; such subjects demand a consideration suitable to their unutterable magnitude. But there is this additional reason for regarding and receiving them ; —our future, our final happiness depends on a cordial reception ; our future, our final, our eternal loss, must be the result of a wilful and persevering rejection of them. Our Lord gives a solemn admonition on this very point—*Take heed, therefore, how ye hear : for whosoever hath, to him shall be given ; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.*

What motives to hear aright, have you here, both in the promise and in the threatening ! The promise assures you, *To him that hath, shall be given.* He that disposes you to hear aright, and retain what you hear, shall multiply his blessings on you. Your delight in, and obedience to, his word, shall be a sure evidence that you belong to Christ, and are going to his glory. While you are thus hearing, he will replenish you with his grace, and in the very use of the means your soul shall be quickened, nourished, and

strengthened. Sometimes, indeed, God magnifies the riches of his grace, in the unexpected and sudden conversion of a notorious sinner ; but ordinarily, " he only visits with the power of his word, those who humbly wait to know what he would have them to do, and sends unqualified hearers not only empty but hardened away." And as his riches are inexhaustible, so he is never weary of enriching his sons. One truth duly received, shall prepare the way for another ; that for a third, till they come to the *measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.* They shall *grow in grace. and in the knowledge of Christ,* till they appear in Zion, and are *filled with all the fulness of God.*

But how solemn is the threatening to those who neglect to hear aright—*Whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away, even that which he seemeth to have.* Negligence in hearing is the sure way to lose all the advantages which you possess. All the means of grace thus unimproved, will be taken away. Thus God sent upon Israel a *famine of hearing the word of the Lord.* Such a famine is, as we have shewn, the worst of all famines ; for it is the inlet to every other evil. All our fancied knowledge, gifts, and attainments, shall be found of no avail, where there is not inward religion, a heart sanctified, and devoted to God. They who bury their talent in a napkin, shall have it taken from them. They who hide their light under a bushel, are in danger of being left in outer darkness, destitute of every thing, save the distressing and agonizing remembrance of wilfully and irrecoverably lost opportunities of attaining the highest blessing, and escaping never-ending sorrow ; save the torturing reflection that all their present misery, with the sad prospect of its eternal duration, was brought on themselves by a wretched choice—that of refusing duly to hear aright.

Hearing the word aright is then a duty of vast importance ; and a duty which it will be desirable more fully to explain. The Church of England, ever alive to man's insufficiency, beautifully states this duty in a prayer in the Litany—" That it may please thee to give to all thy

people increase of grace, to hear meekly thy word, and to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit." The same duty is fully summed up in the following answer in the Assembly's Catechism—"It is required of those that hear the word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation, and prayer, examine what they hear by the Scriptures, receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the word of God; meditate, and confer of it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruits of it in their lives."

But let us enter more particularly into our Lord's direction, *Take heed how ye hear*, in the way of practical rules, only bearing in mind, that while the grace of the Holy Spirit blesses the word to our real good, that same Spirit prepares the heart to receive it aright, and give suitable dispositions that we may hear with profit.

We will first shew what is to be guarded against in hearing; then explain the nature of due hearing; and lastly, give some practical directions that may assist us thus to hear.

1. The precept *take heed*, teaches us to GUARD AGAINST THOSE DANGERS TO WHICH WE ARE EXPOSED. Let us consider in what respects we should take heed:—

1. TAKE HEED TO YOUR MOTIVES IN GOING TO HEAR. What is the object which you have in view? There are many unworthy ends, such as curiosity, criticism, entertainment, or even mere general information about religious topics. These are not the ends at which we should aim. Hearing is not to gratify men's curiosity, but to save their souls; yet it is rather some novelty that attracts most men's attention, than the simple statement of the most solid truths. If there be a funeral sermon for any public character, crowded congregations will attend, and eagerly listen to those parts which relate to the individual; if there be a missionary sermon, those parts which contain facts relative to the heathen will excite most attention. If we may judge of men's motives by their conversation, some come merely like the Athenians, to hear something

new; some to know what will be said on any particular doctrines by the preacher, or to be able to talk about him, and his style, and manner of preaching: others come rather to see what is passing than to hear; but "to enter the house of God, to have our eyes and ears entertained, and not our hearts reformed, must certainly be most displeasing to God." Inconstancy of attendance is frequently connected with this spirit, and such lose the benefits of that full course of divine truth which regular hearers attending one ministry receive. Let us, like the poor man at the pool of Bethesda, who patiently waited many years, and at last was blessed by the Saviour, patiently attend the ministry of the Gospel, and we shall also doubtless receive a blessing. The preaching of the word is an act of grace proclaiming infinitely more than the remission of human penalties, or any temporal evil; it proclaims God's favour to sinners for their eternal good. Shall we spend the time in criticism, curious remarks, and the like, when we should be eagerly listening to the message of Divine mercy, following its directions, and embracing its blessings?

Take heed of INATTENTION. There is often a dulness of hearing very prejudicial to all success in attending upon the ministry. It was the case with the Jews of old. *Hear*, says Isaiah, *ye deaf, and look, ye blind, that ye may see;* and St. Paul, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, notices the same thing—*Ye are dull of hearing, for when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again, which be the first principles of the oracles of God.* Heb. v. 11, 12. Such are not dull as to temporal things; but of spiritual things they say, *what a weariness is it!* Mal. i. 13. They have similar feelings to those who asked, *When will the new moon be gone? that we may sell corn; and the sabbath? that we may set forth wheat?* Amos viii. 5. It is observed by Cradock, that "A minister may have a great congregation, and yet but few hearers, if their minds be stuffed with the world before they come; if they bring their trades, their bargains, their plough, their worldly business along with them. David says of idols, *They have ears, but*

hear not. We have too many such idols in our congregations." Some are asleep, even when they have no bodily infirmity to plead: what a dishonour do they put on religion! what an infectious and evil example to others! what contempt of the presence of God! The Bible records one instance in which drowsiness had nearly been followed by irrecoverable death, to be as it were a warning to all sleepers. When Paul was preaching at Troas, *and continued his speech until midnight, there sat in the window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep; and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell from the third loft, and was taken up dead.* There seemed some excuse for drowsiness at so late an hour, and during so long a discourse; but the record seems left not merely to evidence the divine power in his restoration to life, but also to be a caution against that which brought him into danger. While every allowance should be made for natural weakness and infirmities, which disable some from that attention which they desire to give, and which it is their grief and burden that they cannot give; while we would give to such every advantage of our Lord's kind remark, *the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak;* yet such should remember his question—*What! could ye not watch with me one hour?* And here much might be done, by moderation in food, or by taking a short rest at home previously, or perhaps by standing up part of the time. But there are those who, though they have no natural infirmity, seem, as soon as the sermon commences, to compose themselves as if they designed to sleep through it. O let such remember the majesty and dignity of the great Jehovah in whose house they are assembled! How can they receive a message from him, or obtain the gifts of his Spirit, or the riches of his grace, in such a drowsy state of mind! Some manifestly attend so carelessly and negligently, that what is preached, can hardly be profitably received by them. If they are not thinking of something else, they yet think no longer of what they hear, than while the words are sounding in their ears. Let these

things be felt and mourned ; let them discover your alienation from God, your ruin and depravity, and thus lead you to be earnest in seeking divine grace. Attention is absolutely needful to profitable hearing ; just as while the mouth of the vessel is closed, it is in vain that we attempt to fill it, by pouring any liquid upon it ; so inattention effectually closes the ear and prevents the reception of knowledge, however abundant the instruction given may be ! Lose not all your labour and time in coming to hear. When Samuel attends to God's voice and says, *Speak, for thy servant heareth*, then he receives the revelation of the divine will. 1 Sam. iii. 1—14. In the time of Nehemiah, on the revival of religion, it is said that *the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.* Neh. viii. 3. And so in the time of our Lord it is said, *all the people were very attentive to hear him* (εξεκρεματο, *hanged on him*, as it is in the margin.) Luke xix. 48. Do you wish to be preserved from inattention ? remember the importance of hearing, and the danger of negligence. It helps attention to look at the minister, and as an indication of it ; *the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue, were fastened on our Lord*, when they were eagerly interested. Luke iv. 20. Remember also, that the spirit of attention comes freely from God our gracious Father : *The Lord opened Lydia's heart, that she attended to the things which were spoken of Paul.* Acts xvi. 14. "The Lord turns away the eye and ear of sinners from seeing or hearing vanity, causes his voice to be heard, cures the spirit of slumber, and awakens out of sleep, that he may give light and life."

Take heed of PREJUDICES. Some come to hear with their minds filled with their own notions. They have adopted high doctrinal views, and cannot bear to have practice insisted upon ; or, on the other hand, they dislike to have the doctrines of the Gospel prominently brought forward, and had rather hear moral disquisitions on the excellence of virtue, which never trouble the conscience, nor renew the heart. They have an undue partiality for or against particular individuals. Prejudices may arise

from various causes, from education, the opinion of others, early associations, and the like. But the love of sin, and the want of a holy submission to the mind and will of God, are the principal causes. Prejudices may be taken up against the very best ministers. Jeremiah had to complain in his day, (Jer. vi. 10.) *To whom shall I speak and give warning that they may hear? Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken! behold, the word of the Lord is to them a reproach, and they have no delight in it!* The Jews were prejudiced against our Lord Jesus Christ. They were offended with him on account of the meanness of his birth, (Matt. xiii. 57.) and therefore he could neither do any mighty works, nor preach the Gospel among them. Often on this account they rejected his words. We have a remarkable instance of this, Luke iv. 16—30. Every thing seemed hopeful and promising in the commencement of that discourse; the subject was full of consolation; they were deeply interested, (ver. 20.) they *all bare him witness*, and *wondered* at his *gracious words;* and then Satan injects a prejudice, *Is not this Joseph's son?* Our Lord meets the prejudice by appealing to sentiments common among themselves, and to the history of their fathers; but still, so powerful was the stream of prejudice, that the very means employed to abate it, only swelled it the more; and though our Lord was the preacher, *all they in the synagogue were filled with* such *wrath*, that they sought to destroy the Lord himself. Thus they rejected his Gospel, and perhaps perished for ever. There is a great difference between being *cut to the heart*, (Acts vii. 54,) *and being pricked in the heart.* Acts ii. 37. O let us guard against those prejudices which may ruin, and cultivate that broken and tender spirit which will ever advance our eternal interests. Prejudice is sometimes marked by strong partialities in little things. The Jews were more willing to hear Paul in the *Hebrew* tongue; but when he had once mentioned his being sent to the *Gentiles*, their indignation was so excited, they refused to hear a word more. The angry Pharisees were quieted by his saying that he was a

Pharisee. Acts xxiii. While the preacher speaks agreeably to the hearers' own opinion, they will attend, but will not regard him farther. O what self-conceit, and self-ignorance and folly, is there in this! They expect the preacher should not preach simply the truth, but what will please them. Thus it was that Balak sent for Balaam. Numb. xxiv. 10, 11. They wish him to bless and curse, not as the truth is, but according to their prejudices. But there are those on the other hand, who place such implicit confidence in the words of their teacher, as to receive every thing on his credit, without examination or reflection. This is making man their confidence, instead of the divine word. The plain, practical, self-condemning, and heart-exposing instructions which they receive, offend and prejudice some, so that they cannot bear to hear. What a contrast to this was the spirit of Eli, who, looking beyond the instrument of conveying the distasteful and painful truths which he heard, fixed his eye on the great Governor of all, and humbling himself under the conviction of his own just deservings, cried out, *It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good!* 1 Sam. iii. 18. It is the gracious office of the Holy Spirit to remove prejudices from the mind, and therefore the Apostle prays, that the Ephesians might have given to them *the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of* Christ, *the eyes of* their *understanding being enlightened.*

Take heed to PUT AWAY YOUR SIN. This direction is needful even for Christians. The Apostle James, speaking to those begotten *with the word of truth*, that is, truly regenerated and converted by the Gospel, tells them *to lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness.* The term *filthiness* denotes those lusts, appetites, and sins which defile the soul, such as, all gluttony, drunkenness, excess, and uncleanness; all eager pursuit of worldly things,*

* I know one good man who has found it a most beneficial practice, to put aside all the ordinary employments of the family after six o'clock on Saturday evening; the needles of the ladies, and the dolls of the children are laid aside, and every preparation is made for giving all the Sabbath, as much as may be, to its holy duties.

needless indulgence of the body, covetousness, and earthly-mindedness. These things, under whatever name the world may sanction them, are to be laid apart as exceedingly opposite to truly receiving the word of God. The more our heart hankers after, or desires, or relishes such things, the less we are disposed to regard divine truth. They are like superfluous and hurtful weeds that take up the room of other things, and render the soil unprofitable; they hinder the reception and growth of the good seed. Then *all superfluity of naughtiness*, the overflowings of malignity, as self-will, pride, and hatred, equally hinder the due reception of the word. Yet the regenerate man is not free from such temptations, and the inward working of the heart after such sins. St. Peter speaking also to those born of God, tells them to lay *aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speaking*. These things are to be put away with godly sorrow for our natural corruption, and much care and earnestness.

Take heed of your MANY SPIRITUAL ENEMIES. Our Lord, in the parable of the sower, shows that *the Devil comes and takes away the word from the heart*—that in time of temptation men fall away from the truth—and that the cares, riches, and pleasures of life choke it. These are spiritual enemies that would rob our souls of all profit from the word of life. Be assured that Satan will unceasingly try both to keep you from hearing, and to hinder your profiting when you have heard. Divine grace calls God's servants to many a vigorous effort, to break through obstructions. Consider all that would turn your heart and mind from the truths declared to you, as an enemy to be vanquished. A discharge of needless worldly business; unusual feasting; taking your own carnal pleasure; unnecessary joining in worldly society; or reading trifling books, especially such publications as Sunday or other newspapers, on that holy day on which the word of God is specially to be heard; will assuredly be giving many advantages to our spiritual enemies. Self-righteousness is another adversary, the more dangerous because it is the

least suspected. This leads us to imagine that when we have attended to hear, we have done something meritorious before God, and so we rest in the mere external ordinance. O how often do these things make spoil of the spiritual benefits which we might otherwise receive! A request to take an *innocent* walk in the fields; conversation with idle company, neglect of retirement; these, and the like things, are occasions and means by which our great enemy takes away the word from our hearts.

II. Before we give directions for hearing aright, it may be useful to explain THE NATURE OF DUE HEARING.

The due hearing of the Gospel consists in far more than the mere outward attendance on the ministry of the word, and taking an interest in what is heard. The Scribes and Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Jews in general who rejected our Saviour, often attended upon him, and heard him, and witnessed his mighty works, and yet were not blessed thereby; but rather, by their perverseness, turned their privileges to their greater condemnation. They knew what he said: his words were plain and intelligible enough; but they cavilled at them, and rejected them. Some, indeed, heard him with pleasure for a time; yet when his doctrine opposed their carnal notions, they went no more with him. And so in our day we see multitudes living in this favoured Christian land with immense privileges. O that they would avail themselves of them, and duly improve them! But we see some deriving no benefit though they hear, some wholly shutting their eyes to the light which God has given, and others by infidel publications blasphemously reviling the only way of salvation, and madly casting away from them with indignation the only remedy for all our woe. In these things we have some remarkable testimonies of Scripture verified. In Ezekiel xxxiii. 31, 32, it is said, *They come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness: and, lo! thou art*

unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument, for they hear thy words, but they do them not. In Jeremiah, xliv. 16.) we have an instance of daring rejection of this word: *As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the Lord, we will not hearken unto thee; but we will certainly do whatsoever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth.* And so in the time of our Lord he had to declare, *They seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not; neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive.*

All this shews that due hearing is more than attending to hear. It includes a sure belief, and a conduct corresponding to that belief, springing from the grace of God.

When we rightly hear the words of Christ, there will be a SURE BELIEF of them. Our Lord commended this in Peter who had declared, *Thou hast the words of eternal life, and we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.* They believed the divine testimony, they looked up to Jesus as a Divine Instructor, and humbly and gladly received his doctrine as from God. The same sure belief should be yielded by us to the word of Christ. It is far more important to know Christ with the eyes of the understanding than with those of the body: *Blessed,* says our Lord to Thomas, *are they that have not seen me, and yet have believed.* Believing what you hear, so as to rely on the word of God as what cannot deceive, and beholding the glory of God in the person of Christ, and the mind of God in the doctrine of Christ, mark the blessed man.

There will be also a CORRESPONDING CONDUCT. Thus the Apostles not only believed, but left all and followed Christ. They obeyed his voice. It became the great object of their lives to fulfil the will of Christ. Their faith worked by love, and overcame the world. So will it be with us if we truly believe. We shall know how to prize our many privileges, and be deeply concerned duly to im-

prove them. The different parts of divine truth will produce some suitable effects in our lives. The glorious character of God will inspire us with reverence and confidence, with love and self-devotion. Our danger through sin will lead us to the only refuge. The promises will fill us with hope, and joy, and gratitude, and the precepts will be to us a daily guide and rule of life.

And this is the result of SPECIAL GRACE. When Peter made that decisive confession of his faith, recorded Matt. xvi. 16, our Lord said to him, *Blessed art thou, Simon, son of Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.* Here only is the true root of all the difference between the most devoted believer, and the most presumptuous rejecter of divine truth. It is not that one is naturally better than another, or has more merit and deserving in himself; but it is of the distinguishing grace and mercy of our God. *The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them.* Prov. xx. 12. This is true not only in a natural, but also in a spiritual sense. It is *given* to the disciples of Christ *to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God.*

III. We now proceed to the DIRECTIONS WHICH MAY ASSIST YOU TO HEAR WITH ADVANTAGE, only again stating that there is no direction which a gracious Father is not ready to enable us to follow, and which it is not a privilege and a blessing to fulfil.

1. Hear IN THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER. Of all the directions that can be given, this is the most important; for no other can be practised without the help which prayer obtains. The power of the Lord alone gives us understanding. Luke xxiv. 45. David was well acquainted with divine truth, and an inspired prophet himself, yet he often prays for divine teaching. Remember then at all times, the need of prayer; *the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. God* alone *giveth the increase.* Knowing and feeling this, we should go to hear his word with a praying heart; we should listen with many a secret ejaculation that God would

send home what we hear to our hearts; we should return praying that we may keep what we have heard to our spiritual and eternal good. Useless are all rules and directions as to our real good, until the Holy Ghost gives them life and power. On this point then may our hearts be deeply impressed. Pray for the minister; he can only teach you as God teaches him: ask that he may have truly the gifts of the Holy Spirit, may know himself, and be enabled to declare to others, simply, wisely, and with power, the whole counsel of God, ever preaching such truths as may be to the benefit and salvation of your soul. Every faithful minister earnestly desires the prayers of his people, and is ready to say with the Apostle, *Pray for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mysteries of the Gospel.* It is prayer that causes *the word of the Lord* to *have free course.* 2 Thess. iii. 1. The excellency of the power is of God, and not of us. Pray for ourselves. God only opens the ears of men, and it is only by his grace that you can hear with any profit. O neglect not to seek that grace. Is there one in fifty that prays in private for a special blessing on what he hears? They are not profitable hearers, who are not constant worshippers. Let us seek and expect the divine energy of the Holy Ghost. The word of Christ is the sword of the Spirit, and it is only efficacious when it *comes in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.* When we are duly sensible of our own utter insufficiency to get any profit, even by the divine remedy of the Gospel, but as the Holy Spirit teaches and helps us; when we despair of our own wisdom, and strength, and look, in fervent, and persevering prayer, to the blessed Spirit alone, as the only one who can efficaciously help us; then are we likely to find the Gospel the power of God to our salvation. How suitable for us the prayer, (Job xxxiv. 32.) *that which I know not, teach thou me.* Pray that the Holy Ghost may himself teach you your own insufficiency. Be assured that no natural wisdom, or humanly acquired knowledge, no merely human learning, or powers, or talents, can enable

you to profit by hearing, without the Holy Ghost. When the word came *with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven*, then it came *with power, and with much assurance.* This gift is obtained by prayer. O look for it, supplicate for it, and you shall receive it. It is important after hearing, as well as before : Saul, afterseeing the vision, was employed in prayer. Acts ix. 11. And not merely hear in the spirit of prayer for yourself, but let all that hear with you be thus remembered. And should you receive any good, be not forgetful to render glory to Him to whom it is due. This rule condemns those who come into church when the prayers are half over. There are cases where persons are unable to do more from their peculiar circumstances ; but where this is done without a sufficient reason to excuse it, such persons cannot expect to receive any good : how can they, who throw a public slight on those prayers which express our dependence on the divine blessing, receive that blessing ?

2. Hear in SIMPLICITY OF MIND. The doctrines of the Gospel are *revealed unto babes.* Come, then, with a disposition to be taught. Really desire to be made *wise unto salvation.* Come to hear with singleness of heart, earnestly desiring to know and do the will of God. The word will be profitable to the simple-minded and the sincere Christian. As *new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word.* 1 Peter ii. 2. *Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.* Matt. xviii. 3. *The wayfaring man* (one whose whole aim is single and sincere, looking only to arrive at the end of his journey,) *though a fool, shall not err therein.* Your simple object in hearing, should be, to have your errors and mistakes detected, your ignorance removed, your sins put away, the will of God discovered to you, all holiness promoted in you, and your soul blessed with all spiritual blessings in the use of those means, which God has appointed for conveying them. Let there be this blessed simplicity of intention in hearing, and though the world may despise, the Lord of all will bless. O that we may all desire to

receive the word with the same simplicity that we desire our daily meals, and have as earnest and keen an appetite for spiritual food, as an hungry man has for the food of the body!

3. HEAR WITH CANDOUR. The sacred historian records it to the honour of the Bereans, *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica:* they were of a more ingenious and candid spirit. The original word, ευγενεστεροι, signifies, *well-born, sprung from a noble family.* It seems to intimate, that they were more like their father Abraham, who willingly and gladly received and obeyed the divine message. The Bereans did not at once conclude every thing to be false, which did not agree with their preconceived opinions. They were not the slaves of prejudice. It has been well remarked, "True dignity and nobleness of spirit, greatly consists in au enlarged and unprejudiced mind open to conviction, willing to investigate the truth, to examine the evidence adduced in the support of men's opinions, and to treat religious enquirers with candour, seriousness, and diligence. Such an ingenuous and teachable spirit comes from above." Let it ever be borne in miud, that there is naturally no true nobility of heart in man. The Bereans could not boast of any naturally better disposition; but the Lord graciously prepared their hearts, and their whole conduct was such, that they equally avoided "a blind credulity, an obstinate bigotry, and a heedless conceited incredulity." Let us seek after the same candid, and truly Christian temper. Without it, we shall perpetually be stumbled, rejecting truths the most sacred, and imbibing errors the most delusive.

4. Hear WITH SERIOUSNESS. When Moses had delivered the divine testimony to the children of Israel, he said, *Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, ... for it is not a vain thing, because it is your life.* Deut. xxxii. 46, 47. The Apostle tells the Hebrews, *we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.* Heb. ii. 1. A serious mind should be cultivated previous to going to

the house of God. Is the word of God your life? consider how you listen, when a Physician speaks to you about your own health, or about the health of your children, or beloved friends: how carefully you notice and follow his directions. If any great worldly advantage is mentioned as to be attained, how you listen to the account! how it dwells on your mind, and you think of it over and over again, and love to talk about it. So seriously and earnestly should you listen to the word of God, eagerly attending, lest, to your personal and lasting injury, you lose any valuable direction. Your salvation is too serious a matter to be trifled with. Remember, that God is very serious in sending his ministers to you; they are, if faithful, very serious in prayer for you, and in entreaties with you; the Holy Spirit is very serious in pleading with you, and the work of your salvation is the most serious work in which you can possibly be engaged. Surely we should listen to God's word with a reverence and seriousness, equal to that with which we listen to the request and direction of our highest earthly superior! A pious minister said, "I find that an endeavour to maintain a serious mind on the Sabbath, is greatly blessed. As means by God's blessing maintain a serious mind, so it in return, gives the same blessing to means."

5. Hear with gladness. A readiness to hear is another important part of preparation. *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.* Of the Bereans it is said, *They received the word with all readiness of mind.* One cause of men's being given over to a spirit of delusion is, that they receive not the love of the truth. 2 Thess. ii. 10, 11. The first Christians received the word gladly. Acts ii. 41. A heart prepared of the Lord, eagerly and gladly welcomes his gospel. Be willing to hear. It is the reluctance and backwardness of the natural heart to receive the humbling, holy, and sanctifying, though truly joyful doctrines of the gospel, that hinders its success. We are offended, and we cavil; we dislike, and we object to, the bread of life, after which we should hunger; and turn

away with disgust from those waters after which we should thirst. How different the Bereans, who heard with *all* readiness! The late Mr. Richardson well observed on this point,—"Persons stirred up to serious thinking about their souls, who were before ignorant of God and themselves, and unacquainted with the real nature of every Christian doctrine and duty, must, *as new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby.* What I have heard called 'a spirit of hearing,' unavoidably attends the revival of practical religion in all places. They must, they will seek that light and instruction of which they feel the want. To obtain it, they will break through every barrier, and cast aside prejudices against Dissenters, Methodists, and unauthorised teachers of every sect and name. Like persons dying of hunger, or parched with thirst, they will be ready to swallow the most homely, disgusting, and unwholesome food, and greedily drink water out of the dirtiest ditch. The life of the soul can no more be maintained without spiritual food, than animal life without eating and drinking." The direction, *Let every man be swift to hear*, is full of importance, and indicative of that state of mind which God delights to bless. Here is the best preparation for a cordial reception of the truth. O that such a readiness to hear may be largely granted to all professing Christians, and be met by a wise and full declaration of the unsearchable riches of Christ from all the ministers of his word! We see a beautiful example of such readiness in Cornelius's family: and O that congregations of hearers could say as he said—*Now are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.* An old writer says, "It will appear that we esteem God's ordinance when we shall for the sake of it neglect our profit, hazard our outward peace, seem careless of our credit, strain our purses, and part with all for it."

There have been seasons when men have heard as if they were in earnest to be saved. In the time of the great plague in London, 1665, those ministers who remained among the people, and preached to them, were eminently blessed.

One who himself ministered at this time, thus described it: —" Now there is such a vast concourse of people in the churches, where ministers are to be found, that they cannot many times come near the pulpit doors for the press, but are forced to climb over the pews to them ; and such a face is now seen in the assemblies, as seldom before was seen in London ; such eager looks, such open ears, such greedy attention, as if every word would be eaten which dropt from the mouths of the ministers. If you ever saw a drowning man catch at a rope, you may guess how eagerly many caught at the word, when they were ready to be overwhelmed by this overflowing scourge, which was passing through the city. When death was knocking at so many doors, and God was crying aloud by his judgments, and ministers were now sent to knock, cry aloud, and lift up their voice like a trumpet ; then, then the people began to open the ear, and the heart, which were fast shut and barred before ; how did they then hearken as for their lives, as if every sermon was their last, as if death stood at the door of the church, and would seize upon them as soon as they came forth ; as if the arrows which flew so thick in the city, would strike them, before they could get to their houses ; as if they were immediately to appear before the bar of that God, who by his ministers was now speaking to them ? Great were the impressions which the word then made upon many hearts, beyond the power of man to effect, and beyond what the people before ever felt, as some of them have declared. When sin is reproved, O the tears that slide down from the eyes ! when the judgments of God are denounced, O the tremblings which are upon the conscience ! When the Lord Jesus Christ is made known and preferred, O the longings and openings of heart unto him ! When the riches of the Gospel are displayed, and the promises of the covenant of grace are set forth and applied, O the inward burnings and sweet flames which were in the affections ! I hope, not a few were born again : a strange moving there was on the hearts of multitudes in the city : and I am persuaded that many were brought

effectually to close with Jesus Christ, whereof, some died by the plague with willingness and peace; and others remain stedfast in God's ways unto this day." *

6. HEAR IN FAITH. The Israelites in the wilderness, having no faith in God's word, lost the promised blessings. *The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.* Heb. iv. 2. You would not dishonour your bosom friend, or a revered father, by distrusting his word; have then a generous confidence in God; have a sure conviction that he will not deceive you. All his threatenings must be fulfilled; all his promises shall be exactly accomplished. The precepts of the God of power, wisdom, and love, cannot fail, if obeyed, to make you happy. His invitations to you, to partake of his mercies, however rich, and full, and free those mercies are, they are all made in truth. O believe them, confide in them, and rely upon them. Observe how children entirely trust their parents, and leave all consequences with them; and how the babe clings to its mother, and draws nourishment from her; so let us trust our far better, even our heavenly, parent; so let us cling to, and embrace our Saviour Jesus Christ, and receive our supplies from his inexhaustible fulness. When Christ is preached by the minister, faith should be so exercised by the hearer, that he should be ready to say, as the Eunuch did to Philip, *I believe that Jesus is the Son of God.* There are many hindrances to be overcome, in receiving and obeying the word of God; but faith will carry you above all difficulties and obstructions, and above the opposition and enmity of the world, and will quench the fiery darts of Satan our great enemy. When you hear, therefore, of the divine anger, believe and fear, lest you should endure that anger, and fly to him, *who has delivered us from the wrath to come.* When you hear his promises, believe them, be persuaded of them, and embrace them, and thus ensure to yourself an interest in them. "To hear and not believe," says Dr. Owen, "is in spiritual life, what to see meat and not to eat, is in the

* See Gillies' Historical Collections, vol. i. p. 220.

natural ; it will please the fancy, but never nourish the soul." You *may* expect to receive a blessing. If it be not your own fault, you shall not attend without spiritual good. Consider what God has promised. Look at the declarations, that *the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth ;* and that his *word shall not return void,* and hope for, and desire these blessings. Look to be more deeply convinced of sin ; more clearly enlightened in the knowledge of the divine will ; more strongly and practically impressed by the truth ; more comforted and rejoiced ; and more thoroughly confirmed and established in the ways of God. In short, go in the spirit described, Isa. ii. 3. *Let us go up to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways.*

7. Hear in the spirit of SELF-APPLICATION. There are many who are very ready to think all that is said applies to others ; or are thinking how it suits their friends. They hear for others and not for themselves. Hearing for *others* is a very common case. A valued Christian friend has here remarked ;—" Judging from my own feelings, I should suppose that it prevails frequently, and to a great extent, and always injuriously to ourselves, further than as it may stir us up to prayer for the parties alluded to.* When Peter, after our Lord's address to him, turns and asks about John, *Lord, what shall this man do?* he received

* On this subject of hearing for others, the following illustration is worth recording.

Many years ago, among the numerous attendants on the ministry of the late Mr. Richardson, was Mrs. G., a pious lady, whose family resided at a neighbouring village. In the same place lived Betty, a young countrywoman, along with her aged mother. Betty was also a diligent hearer of Mr. R., and had become a flaming professor, but had many faults, which Mrs. G. regretted, and wished to see corrected. One Sunday Mr. R. preached a sermon which appeared to Mrs. G. exactly to suit Betty's case. "I could not help," says Mrs. G., "lifting up my eyes to see if she was at church. She *was* there, and appeared to me to be a good deal affected." I could not cease my attention, as her emotion seemed to increase; which in fact it did, to such a degree, that at last she quitted the church. Poor Betty ! thought I, how well it is that conviction has fastened upon her; but I fear she will undergo great distress. Under that apprehension I called upon her next morning, and said, Betty, how do you do? I saw you go out of the church yesterday, and that you appeared very uneasy under Mr. R's. searching sermon." "Indeed I was, Ma'am," said Betty ; "I sat till I could sit no longer: it went to my heart to think of my poor mother!" "I went home," adds Mrs. G., "resolved for the future to endeavour to hear for myself, and not for my neighbours."

a just reproof, *What is that to thee; follow thou me!* John xxi. 21, 22. The application of the sermon to ourselves is the first step towards receiving benefit. Are not many merely regarding the style and manner of the preacher, or the system and theory which he holds, without once thinking that they are personally concerned, and that life and death are set before them? But at the same time, this self-application requires judgment and discrimination. There are those who make a wrong application. If secure and careless, they will apply to themselves all the characters of the righteous, and all the comfortable promises made to such characters. If anxious and desponding, they appropriate in like manner to themselves all the descriptions of the wicked, and the threatenings made to their sins. Thus some speak to themselves *peace and safety*, when there is no peace for them in their present state; and others speak terror without a cause, and make their hearts sad, when the Lord designs it not. Now the true remedy for these evils is, to examine more carefully into their own characters, and ascertain their real state: and, above all, to pray for the enlightening of the Holy Spirit, who alone wisely and efficaciously applies divine truth, so as to regenerate, sanctify, and gladden the heart. Some are apt to think that the minister meant to preach to them in particular, because his sermons happen to touch their consciences and describe their character,—and they are offended. But this almost invariably is a total mistake. A wise minister will avoid preaching at *individuals*, while he makes a point of laying open *characters*, so that all present may discern themselves, and the *consciences* of each *may bear witness*, and *the secrets of his heart* be *made manifest*. Where a person thinks that the minister has been informed of his particular case, ordinarily he knew not of such a person in the congregation: but, O let the faithful testimony of conscience, thus speaking plainly to you, not be trifled with. Hear personally and individually, and you shall receive a real and lasting blessing. At least, give the word this consideration, What if it should be true! if this

should be my state!—if I am in this danger!—if that danger should be thus tremendous!—such a thought has often led to the conversion of the soul.

8. Hear in HUMILITY. God has called us *to receive with meekness the engrafted word.* James i. 21. He has promised blessings to *those who tremble at his word.* Isa. lxvi. 2. He requires that we should listen with reverence to his Son. Matt. xvii. 5. It is infinite condescension in the great God to address thus repeatedly and graciously fallen man. Let our humility and reverence in some degree correspond with his astonishing grace. Cultivate then a meek and docile spirit. The Bible not only comes from our Creator, but displays much of his glory, and we are but poor ignorant creatures of a day; let us then, as it becomes us, receive his truth in a humble and lowly heart. Our natural hearts are not only careless and inattentive, but also proud and captious: and it is only grace, through much humbling experience, that makes them lowly and teachable. With a meek spirit, a man will not at once quarrel with what he hears, however it may appear to him mysterious and inexplicable, but will wait in the posture of a learner, for clearer light. Instead of objecting to an awful denunciation, he will tremble at it; instead of doubting a gracious promise, he will desire an interest in it. Sensible of his own ill-deservings, and great depravity, convinced of his own ignorance and weakness, he feels the need of a revelation like the Gospel, full of mercies, and gladly receives it in its length and breadth; in all its doctrines, however contrary to the carnal mind, and however offensive to the proud heart; and in all its precepts, however strict, and however opposed to his self-indulging pleasures. Bearing in mind our guilty and ruined state, even remembering our own innumerable transgressions and demerits, let an abased, lowly, contrite spirit mark our hearing. Let us listen as to words *whereby we may be saved.* We are lost and undone; the Gospel is a system of recovery; but it is either a savour of death unto death, or a savour of life unto life, just as it is received. A man feeling his ruin is humbled;

a man in real distress gladly receives aid. The minister speaks not in his own name, but in the name of the great God. *Where the word of a king is, there is power.* Eccles. viii. 4. Though it be then contrary to your natural inclination and to your previous views, remember, if it be the word of God, it cannot be despised with impunity, and there must be an immense blessing in humbly receiving and obeying it. In few things do we more manifestly exhibit want of reverence to God, than in slighting and despising his word; in few things does that humility and lowliness (which in his sight are of great estimation) more shine than when we unfeignedly submit to and reverence his declared will and his revealed word.

9. COMPARE ALL YOU HEAR WITH THE WRITTEN WORD OF GOD. This was the practice of the Bereans. Even when an inspired apostle preached, they *searched the Scriptures daily whether these things were so.* Acts xvii. 11. Nothing has any divine authority but as it comes from God, or is according to his word. Yield your mind up then to the plain will of God, and to nothing else. Have a simple regard to his authority. As long as we receive doctrines merely on the word of ministers, we build our faith on human opinions, and it may be shaken by other human opinions; but when the Holy Scriptures are made the sole foundation of our faith, and we compare all we hear with the word of God, and receive it only as it is drawn from that pure fountain, we have then a divine testimony, and build on that which, like its great Author, is not variable, and cannot be shaken. We are bound, as reasonable and accountable creatures, thus to form our own judgment of what we hear, and not to take our sentiments only on man's authority. That authority may justly demand from us patient consideration, but not unqualified submission. All the fathers and ecclesiastical writers put together do not form the rule of judgment—God's holy word is our final judge. The apostle doubtless wished the Galatians, in considering either him, or *an angel from heaven,* that should *preach another Gospel,* accursed, to form their own

judgment on what they heard. Let us have a high reverence of the Divine Word as the only umpire in sacred truth ; let us be well acquainted with it, that by it we may try the spirits ; 1 John iv. 1. We may otherwise be misled by deceivers and false teachers, and take that for the word of God, which is indeed only the fancy of an ignorant, as well as fallible creature. But perhaps you object both to hearing, and believing what you hear—the variety of opinions to be found among preachers, and the possibility of being deceived by dependance on them ; or even say, 'Scarcely two of them are of a mind, and therefore my resolution is, I will believe none.' You forget that there is a divine rule to prove *all things*. Hieron, an old writer, says, "It is not the counsel of the Holy Ghost, because there is a spirit of error in the mouths of many, and the best learned may mistake, therefore cease to hear, but because it is thus, be sure to *try*." 1 Thess. v. 21.*

10. Hear in the SPIRIT OF OBEDIENCE. The directions of St. James (chap. i. 22—25,) on this point are very express. We shall have to consider them more fully in another place. Hearing is not the end of our attendance on the ministry ; it is but a means of assisting us to practical obedience, and it is a vain thing merely to hear, and learn our duty, if our lives never be the better. Determine then that you will, by the grace of God, practise all that is delivered to you by his ministers from his word. Often ask yourself, How can I best discharge the duties that have been brought before me ? How can I most carefully shun the sins that have been pointed out ? Submit yourselves, your souls and body, your estate, your family, all you are and have, to God's holy word. Often lift up your heart in secret ejaculations, while hearing, with reference to this end—'Lord, write this thy law on my heart!' 'Lord,

* He farther adds, "Try what you hear by the work it has on your soul ; the whole Scripture specially aims at three things—humility, comfort, and obedience. 1. To abase man in his own eyes, and to lay him in the dust. 2. To refresh his soul, and to bring his bones, which have been broken, to rejoice. 3. To frame his heart to a constant desire and care to please God. The doctrine which tends to further these three is true; that which is an impediment to any of these three must be rejected as unsound."

teach me to do thy will!' If you hear in a spirit of obedience, you will hear with a desire personally to obey. You will not be thinking of others, and be wishing, 'O that such a one, my relation, my neighbour, my master or mistress, or servant, heard this, it just suits them!' let your thoughts rather be such as these—'O let me take heed how I hear, that I may obey; this reaches my case —*here* I am guilty—*here* I must amend my ways—I am *the man* concerned—let me begin to practise this duty, to believe this promise, to rest on my Saviour, to seek his Holy Spirit, and to aim at his glory in all I do!' Thus shall we receive the best profit by hearing. *If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.* John vii. 17.

PRAYER BEFORE HEARING.

O most gracious Jehovah, the Fountain of Light, and the Giver of all Wisdom, and my reconciled Father in Christ Jesus, I render to thee my grateful thanksgivings for the light of thy truth, and the many spiritual advantages which thou hast given to me.

Open, O Lord, I beseech thee, mine eyes, that I may know the hope set before me. Open mine ears to hear thy truth. Thou hast said, The preparation of the heart in man is from the Lord: O do thou then prepare my heart to hear. It is careless and unimpressed; it is hard and stony; it is too often filled with worldly thoughts, and vain and sinful passions; O Lord, create in me a clean heart, O Lord, make my heart soft, and tender, and humble, that I may receive thy word with all readiness of mind and meekness of spirit.

O give me thy Holy Ghost largely and fully. May the blessed Spirit be my teacher, and sanctify me by thy truth. Give me grace to desire the sincere milk of the word. Give me a simple faith in every part of thy revealed truth, and an unfeigned submission of mind to it.

Lord, help me to hear in the spirit of prayer, of faith, and of love. Sanctify my memory to retain, and my

affections to embrace thy truth. Remove far from me all prejudices. Deliver me from the love of darkness, from besetting sins, worldly fears, and whatever may obstruct a cordial reception of thy holy will. Give me a childlike spirit, that I may be teachable and humble, and give full credit to all that thou my heavenly Father hast said.

O Heavenly Father, my tender and compassionate God and Saviour, let me not be satisfied with hearing only, or the outward reception of the promise : but may I receive Christ Jesus, the only Lord and Saviour, into my heart, and be filled with his Spirit, and enjoy that blessed fellowship which all thy people have, with thee and thy Son Jesus Christ.

And let thy word have free course and be glorified, not only in my own soul, but among all that shall hear that word, and in every place, till it be known and received through the whole world, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE IMPORTANCE OF REFLECTING ON WHAT WE HAVE HEARD, WITH A PRAYER AFTERWARDS.

This part of the hearer's duty is so essential to his real profit, and so generally neglected, that we shall be excused for giving it a more distinct consideration. If we rest satisfied with mere hearing, without reflection, we shall never attain pure and undefiled religion. A person may hear and admire at the time, and yet be merely interested for the moment; if he think not of it afterwards, he will not be the better but the worse for hearing. Every time the truths of God are declared to him, they may make less sensible impression, and leave a less practical influence upon him; he may be less and less moved, till he becomes totally unimpressible to the most solemn and affecting truths. While on the other hand, if by divine grace he duly reflect on what he hear, he will become more alive to the power of truth, more softened under its impressions, and more influenced by it in his whole spirit, and character, and conduct.

It is a striking description of the Virgin Mary's mind, on hearing what the shepherds told her, *She kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.* We should endeavour to follow her example, desiring the memory to retain, and the heart to meditate on the truths concerning Christ. They are worth keeping and pondering in the heart.

It is to be greatly feared that Christians but very little

attend to this duty. Let this enquiry be put by each reader to his own conscience—What is my practice after hearing the word ? Do I make it a point of duty to ponder and meditate on what I hear ? Do I ordinarily give a stated time for this ?

Certainly, many return home to their family and friends, and enter on general conversation, or reading, totally unconnected with what they have heard. Some take up a weekly journal to pass the time, and others a trifling book ; and so, in one way or other, all good thoughts are soon dissipated, and the sermon has, perhaps, hardly once after it was heard, received a passing reflection. Is it not the case with too many, that the mere act of hearing is that with which their minds and consciences are satisfied ; and that the practising what they hear is a very inferior consideration ? They desire, indeed, to be interested, quickened, and excited while they hear ; but they are careless about a life corresponding to the doctrines and precepts. The time after hearing is a most critical moment, as it respects our salvation. The word may then become effectual to our eternal good. The seed has been sown : God is ready to give the blessing. O let us seek it ; let us not by impertinent visits, worldly business, or secular pleasures, lose the rich, the invaluable blessing.

The importance of this subsequent reflection and improvement will appear, if we consider why we come to hear the word. No considerate person can surely be so ignorant as to come with the self-righteous idea of obliging God, as if he were indebted to us for coming. Hearing separated from practical influence, is neither commendable in itself, nor acceptable to God ; it is in truth mere self-deception, and tends only to our ruin. Matt. vii. 26. The intelligent Christian hears, in order to be made wise unto salvation, or in order to be quickened in the Christian life.

Now in order to be made wise unto salvation, more is necessary than merely listening to the voice of the preacher. If you neglect to think on what you hear, your mind will

be little informed and enlarged, and your heart will not be sanctified. Subsequent thought and reflection, is that which turns it to our real nourishment. The Apostle tells the Corinthians, (1 Cor. xv. 1, 2.) *I declare unto you the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand. By which also ye are saved, if ye hold in memory what I preached unto you.* O why should you lose all the time, and care, and efforts to attend to hear, and never be really better for it all! As you value then your eternal salvation, meditate on the word; let it not carelessly pass from you; but recollect it, and bring it by prayer and reflection into your heart and life.

Or, if you desire to be quickened in the Christian life, the mere sound of the minister's voice, or his most fervent discourses, however excellent, or pathetic, or eloquent, will not do this. The permanent impression is made on the heart by the blessed Spirit, through subsequent reflection. One sermon duly improved in this way, will do more real good, than hundreds of sermons heard carelessly, and thought of no more. Meditate then in private, on what you hear in public, if you would be quickened and animated in the good ways of the Lord.

But how is this general direction to be reduced to practice? We proceed to give a few plain directions.

Seek to IMPROVE YOURSELF ALSO BY PRIVATE STUDY. The time allowed for public preaching and hearing, though invaluable, is necessarily very limited: and unless the advantages thus given us be improved by private study as well as reflection, we shall make comparatively but very little progress in divine knowledge.

Though a poor man has not much time for reading, yet in the long winter evenings, and on Sundays, he can generally get a little leisure; and though the Bible will ever be the poor pious man's favourite book, yet if he has opportunity and ability to procure them, he should read other books to inform his mind, and edify his heart.

The Christiau in the middle ranks of life should also

pursue a larger course of study. Do not most persons take up their religious knowledge far too cursorily and accidentally, even when their views are in the main correct? and hence are they not apt to be driven about by every wind of doctrine?

We advise you after hearing, to make it your aim to RECOLLECT what you have heard. Some for this purpose take notes during the sermon, and have found real benefit from it.* Some, having found taking notes had a tendency to divert the mind from self-application, as the minister proceeds, write down when they return home, the heads of the sermons, and the most important practical parts: this practice cannot fail to be useful. At any rate, enter not, if possible to avoid it, into worldly company and conversation, immediately after the sermon. This drives away what we have heard, from our minds. As early as may be, we should seek to recal what has been preached to us, that it may be fixed in our memory. Endeavour to remember, at least, the leading divisions of the discourse. It is recorded of our good King Edward VI. that he took notes of the sermons which he heard. Why should you not find as much advantage in keeping memorandums of what you hear, for your spiritual benefit, as in the world, men do in making notes of various things which they would otherwise forget, for their temporal advantage. The Apostle says, *Ye are saved, if ye keep in memory*, if ye hold fast, what I preached unto you. What an indescribably important "*if!*" A forgotten Gospel saves not. See how St. James condemns the forgetful hearer. James i. 22—25.

Besides recollecting, MEDITATE upon the truths; ponder them, weigh them, and judge of their real value. Enter

* A venerable friend remarks, on taking notes of sermons, "This was my way for near forty years. The effect was, not (I hope) 'to divert my mind from self-application, but rather to deaden, at the moment, those sensible religious affections which such instructions as those which I heard were calculated to excite; but on reviewing or copying out my notes, (which I often did) I seemed to regain what I might happen to have lost in both instances. I have suffered since I gave over the practice, (which was becoming wearisome to me) in want of attention as a hearer, and still more so in defect of memory, both of which, especially the latter, may be imputed to advanced age."

thus into their real excellence. We are told of the righteous, *His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night.* Weigh, then, by meditation, the importance of what you have heard, and consider how far it relates to you, and how you may bring it into your daily practice. Without this, a multitude of sermons may be all in vain, and much instruction still unprofitable. One sermon may drive out another, and not a doctrine be really believed and felt, not a precept obeyed. Such a continual hearing, with a wilful neglect of subsequent consideration, produces by degrees hardness of heart, and a seared conscience. It has been remarked, that more people are undone in reference to both worlds, for want of considering what they very well know, than for want of knowing what concerns their real welfare. It is not merely the quantity of food which we take that makes our bodies strong, but the proper digestion of what we eat; and more suffer from too much, than from too little food. And so with our souls, it is not merely the quantity of instruction which is given to us, that makes our souls strong, but the due consideration, and self-application of what we are taught.* The Apostle connects meditation and divine teaching, *Consider what I say, and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.*

The Homily of the Scriptures thus expressively describes this duty—"Let us with fear and reverence lay up in the chest of our hearts these necessary and fruitful lessons; let us night and day muse, and have meditation and contemplation in them; let us ruminate, and, as it were, chew the cud, that we may have the sweet juice, spiritual effect, marrow, honey, kernel, taste, comfort, and consolation of them; let us stay quiet, and certify our consciences with the most infallible certainty, truth, and perpetual assurance of them. Let us pray to God (the only author of these heavenly studies,) that we may speak,

* "I find it easier," said a good man, "to go six miles to hear a sermon, than to spend one quarter of an hour in meditating and praying over it in secret, as I should when I come home." See P. Henry's Life, p. 199.

think, believe, live, and depart hence according to the wholesome doctrine and verities of them."

It would help to fix what we hear in our memory, if we were to CONVERSE with others, in a *practical* way, on what we have been hearing. Why should not the members of a pious family converse together on the truths which they hear, as worldly men do on those things which delight them. This would fix them in your minds; the beneficial recollection would continue, and each would be stirred up to excel in spiritual wisdom. There is need here to guard against mere display of our own ability, a criticising of what has been heard, either in the way of admiration of man, of praise, or of censure, and applying it to others, and not to ourselves. Such conversation after sermons is as common as it is unprofitable. But if our hearts are really interested in godliness, we shall feel what we have heard; we shall exhort one another to attend to it; we shall provoke one another to love and good works: and thus we shall grow in spiritual wisdom, strengthening each other's remembrance of what the minister has declared from the word of God, by our mutual recollection, and confirming it by other parts of that word. Was not David's conversation of this character? *We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company.* Ps. lv. 14. In some families, there is a good practice for one member of the family to put in writing full heads of the sermon, and let it be read over before family prayer in the evening.* Such a practice must greatly

* An aged friend says, "With a view to reading over the heads of the sermon, and questioning the children, I took notes of the sermon; and I can venture, from experience, to pronounce on its utility. The method I pursued was not precisely that suggested above. I required the elder children, between the service, (which was an afternoon one) and the family catechising, to write, from memory, an account of the sermon, which I reviewed at leisure. At the family evening service, I scarcely ever called for a *narrative* account; but with my notes before me, and possessed of the dimensions of the different capacities, I put my questions to each, (as the lawyer from his brief;) thus drawing out *their* understanding and explanation of the contents, and correcting and commenting as I went along. The very youngest, for instance, could tell the text, or, if not, a word or two of the text, or perhaps some striking expression in the sermon; and so we went on progressively, in the catechetical way, through the circle. Through the goodness of God, I have reason to believe that this mode, which to them was at once entertaining and edifying,

help the minister's labour and the hearer's profit. It must also be a benefit to those members of the family who were prevented hearing. It has been observed, "If attendance on children, or other necessary occasions, cause us to keep our servants at home, when others are busied in the service of the church, we should do our endeavours to supply the loss of public instruction, by our private admonitions, and by rehearsing at home those good directions which we received in the public ministry." With this should be joined, questioning the children of the family, and their being instructed in some catechism.*

VIEW THE SUBJECT BROUGHT BEFORE YOU WITH REFERENCE TO PRACTICE. Each doctrine or duty which may have been treated of in the Sermon, should be practically considered as it affects your future conduct. Has the subject of the minister been the law of God in its purity, excellence, and extent? let it suggest these thoughts—I see how guilty I am, I feel that I cannot be justified by that law which I must acknowledge to be just and good; how great my ruin; how immense the necessity of a Redeemer and Sanctifier! Let me go to him without delay for pardon and strength. Has the subject been our salvation by the death of Christ? let it be thus improved; O how evil is sin that required such sufferings from a Being so glorious; how great God's love; let me thankfully part with every thing that would hinder my obtaining an interest in so great a salvation! Has the subject been our fallen nature? let it lead you to think, O my

had a happy effect in grounding them in the knowledge, and (I hope) love of the truth. Of *servants*, I never could make any thing in that way, though I sometimes attempted it. They seemed to think it quite enough to sit by and hear; but even this familiar method was not, I trust, unprofitable to them. So far as my own experience goes, one sermon on the Lord's-day, thus recorded, analyzed, 'marked, learnt, and digested,' is more *profitable* than two or more in succession where such a review is neglected, though the sitting under them may be more *pleasant*."

* Among the multitude of little works of the present day, in the catechetical form, it might be difficult and invidious to mention any in particular; the Church Catechism broken into short Questions; the Exposition published by the Bristol Church of England Tract Society; the Rev. W. Marsh's Catechism, and the useful Catechisms of the Rev. Basil Woodd, and his Abridgment of Gastrell in the Catechetical form, with Dr. Watts's Catechisms and his Scripture History, will be familiar to our reader.

miserable condition through sin, who can utter all the malignancy of sin! what an infinite mercy that I have not been left to perish in so great a ruin ; but though I am fallen in Adam, there is a way of recovery in Christ. Has the subject been repentance? let it lead you to self-inquiry, whether you can discern in your own heart the marks of true repentance ; let it show you how hard your heart is, that sorrows so little for your many sins, and how great the Saviour's grace that gives repentance! In this way practically apply to your own individual conduct the various truths delivered to you, that you may be really edified by what you hear.

Besides recollecting, meditating on, conversing about, and practically viewing the truths which you hear, REFER CONSTANTLY TO THE WORD OF GOD. The Bereans, as we have noticed in the preceding chapter, searched in private, whether the doctrine of the Apostles accorded with the Scriptures: they did this *daily*, diligently studying and investigating the different testimonies of the word, just as a judge carefully goes through all the evidence that has been presented before him, omitting nothing that is material, that he may give a right judgment. Every faithful minister will rejoice to find his people thus searching the Scriptures for themselves. It is a first principle of the Protestant religion. It is the very point to which it is most desirable that our hearers should be brought, that their faith may be in God, and not in man. The *daily* study of the Bereans seems to say to us, "Do not be content merely with hearing the Gospel from your minister on the Sunday : let the Holy Bible itself be your chief confidence, your every-day companion. Nor is it a light matter on which your judgment is to be formed. It concerns eternity, and more imperatively demands attention than any other subject whatsoever, for thus *faith cometh*, and from faith, salvation." See the happy Bereans now in eternal bliss. Partakers, through faith, of Christ's salvation, they were blessed in him ; and could we now behold them, we should see them rejoicing before the throne of

God, blessed through all eternity, having entered into the full enjoyment of that promise, *Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.* Is not that glory worth a little sacrifice and self-denial, worth a little giving up of our prejudices, and passions, and sinful indulgences; worth submitting our dark understandings to the clearly-revealed mind of God, and the gracious teachings of his Holy Spirit?

But while Christians have an undoubted right to try all that they hear by the divine standard, do not abuse this right and make it foster pride; do not make your own opinion, instead of scripture, the judge. Where hearers do this, a faithful sermon, full of scriptural truth, may be reproached by one as legal, by another as Autinomian, by another as Calvinistic, by another as Arminian, by another as mere morality; while all the time, the plain truths of the Bible only were delivered. Be not thus partial judges of your ministers. There are those who enjoy religious advantages, which millions earnestly covet, who put away all from them, and as if surfeited with the heavenly manna, despise and reject the bread of life. O then let us be serious and humble inquirers; and not presumptuous judges of what we hear!

But the most important work after all is, in retirement, and with all earnestness, to PRAY for the blessing of God. He, he only *giveth the increase.* O let us honour his Spirit by looking for that aid, as the only efficient improver of all we hear, the only guide, sanctifier, and comforter of our souls. No regulations, however excellent, without the blessed Spirit's holy and heavenly grace, will do us any good. Satan does not fly from human words and resolutions. He is eager to take away the precious seed. Let us go to our closets then, let us kneel before God, let us earnestly with uplifted hands, and all ardour of desire, spread the sermon which we have heard, and our own insufficiency to obey, before Him whose grace is sufficient. He will give *grace to help in time of need.* As the minister should go from his knees to the house of God, and return

thither ; so the people will find rich spiritual blessings from a similar course. It is the office of the Holy Spirit to bring to our remembrance the things which we have heard. John xiv. 26. Let the substance of the sermon be turned into prayer and intercession, and we shall receive the life-giving influence of the Holy Spirit, making it the power of God to our salvation.

PRAYERS AFTER HEARING.

I.

O Lord God, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, I give unto thee unfeigned thanks for the light of thy Gospel, and for the opportunity which I have now had of hearing thy holy word.

Pardon my dulness and inattention, my unbelief and carelessness ; and notwithstanding my many defects, O do thou give me an abundant increase to the good seed which has been sown in my heart. Let thy Holy Spirit bring thy word to my remembrance, and make it sanctifying, and fruitful to thy glory, and my eternal good. Let not my spiritual enemies prevail against me ; but may I have grace from thee duly to improve my present advantages, and to become wise unto salvation.

II.

O Thou, who to them that have no might increasest strength ; thou, who art my reconciled Father in Christ Jesus, full of compassion, and plenteous in mercy, thou knowest my great weakness, and how soon temptations and trials, and the cares of the world, would hinder all real profit from thy word. I look up then to thee, I look even to thee alone, to cause that which I have heard to be an abiding blessing to my soul. May thy Holy Spirit write thy law in my heart, and cause me to walk in thy statutes and judgments. O give me a spiritual discernment of the truth, and incline my heart to a practical obedience

to it, so that I may not only be a hearer but a doer of the word. May I thus, by the fruits of a holy life, glorify thy great name, and have it made manifest in my own conscience, that thou hast from the beginning chosen me to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the truth. All this, with every spiritual blessing, I ask in the alone worthy name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

CHAPTER IX.

ON PRACTICAL OBEDIENCE TO THE WORD.

DIVINE truth was, in all its parts, designed to have a practical tendency! Hence, where truly received, while it enlightens the understanding, it leads to the unreserved submission of the will, and the obedience of the heart. The grace of the Holy Spirit effects by the word, corresponding tempers and practice to the truth revealed. 1 Peter i. 22, 23. The threatenings awaken attention, and so influence, that *the prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself.* Prov. xxii. 3. The promises of divine mercy in a free salvation, through a Redeemer, produce faith, humility and gratitude, love and devotion. The pure and holy law of God leads to conviction of sin, sense of danger, and earnest applications for help. The glorious gospel inspires with hope, and joy, and peace. The Christian graces and tempers become a test of character, and lead to self-examination and humiliation.

The Hebrews have a proverb,—"Whosoever hears and learns the law, and does not act according to it, is like to a man that sows and does not reap." Works of obedience are the very harvest for which the seed of the word is sown. The first design of hearing, is indeed to obtain knowledge; but the ultimate design is to be conformed to the divine will, and so prepared for the Divine glory. This is thus expressed by Moses; *Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear*

the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law. Deut. xxxi. 12. Let us then cast away our most beloved sins. Let us not merely, like Herod, *hear gladly, and do many things*, and yet from love of one particular sin, ultimately reject the whole truth; (Mark vi.) or like Ahab, who (determining still to keep his purpose of going to Ramoth Gilead,) rejected the words of Micaiah, (1 Kings xxii.) and perished in the battle.

The truths of the Bible are not matters of speculation, or things of indifference; but, when cordially received, produce a striking change, and a powerful effect. The Apostle speaks of this when he expresses his gratitude to God for the change wrought among the Romans—*God be thanked that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered to you;* or, as it might be rendered, *the model of doctrine into which ye were delivered.* Just as that which is melted and poured into a mould, takes the form and disposition of the mould, so the dispositions, tempers, and life of the Christian are moulded and fashioned by divine truth—his *conversation* is such as *becometh* the Gospel.

St. James uses another figure, containing something of a similar sentiment, when he calls the Scriptures, *The ingrafted word, which is able to save your soul.* This figure is very expressive.* The shoot, or slip, that is engrafted, is not of the proper growth of the tree, but is taken from another tree. A good shoot is put on a bad stock, and so changes the course of the juice to the strengthening a new plant, sweetening the sap, which it receives from the stock, and making it a means of producing and bringing forth good fruit. Thus the word of Christ engrafted on our bad

* Archbishop Usher says, "We may have a little motion by the word, yet there is a rock in our souls, a stone in our hearts, and though we may sometimes seem to receive it with some affection, and be made as it were sermon sick, yet it holds but a while, it betters us not: why, because it is not received as an ingrafted word. Therefore St. James says, *Receive with meekness the ingrafted word.* Let the word be ingrafted in thee; one sprig of it is able to make thee grow up to everlasting life. Be not content with the hearing of it, but pray God it may be firmly rooted in your hearts: this will cause a softening." See his Twenty Sermons.

nature, becomes a shoot from which the fruits of righteousness are produced. It is a vital principle productive of spiritual life. Just as the graft inserted in the stock becomes a new means of bearing quite a new fruit on the stock on which it is grafted, so the word of God, when received into the heart of the believer, produces there the tempers and dispositions which are inculcated in that word, and form its true character. Your natural vigour and energy, your judgment and affection, all thus receive a right and fruitful direction. The word is sometimes called *a seed*, (1 Peter i. 23.) but the idea of a graft seems to convey an intimation of farther benefit. It is said that the seed of fruit-trees when sown, will often degenerate, and produce such fruit as is not worth cultivating; but when grafts are taken from good trees, they will not deteriorate, or fall away; the leaves, the wood, the flowers, and the fruit are perfectly the same with those of the tree from which the graft is taken. O that it might please God, Christian reader, that his divine truth may be so grafted in us, that there may be a constant union between us and the word, and that all the fruit peculiar to that word may appear in our life.

But it is, alas! too often found that the truths of God do not produce a practical obedience, and that men hear without being the better for what they hear. This subject calls for more full notice. St. James speaks of it at some length, and sums up his remarks in the direction—*Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your ownselves.* James i. 22.

It is very important to hear; it is the first step towards salvation; and those who altogether disregard the word, are in the broad road *that leads to destruction.* But men may sit and hear the word frequently, and not object to it, and yet never be influenced by that word to change their life. They do not hear it for that purpose, but from various inferior motives, and thus hear without practical benefit. They come as HEARERS ONLY.

It may be well to enlarge on this topic. Thus, some

come from CUSTOM; they have been brought up in this good habit; their friends look for their attendance; their parents perhaps expect it from them if young, or their master or mistress require it of them if servants; they would feel uneasy even, if they did not come: but still they may so come that nothing is farther from their mind, than the intention of hearing to have their conduct guided, or that they are really interested in what the minister says. In such case, attendance is like a mere mechanical act of the body, something that habit and custom have made easy, and even necessary; but, through the deadness and worldliness of their minds, it is unprofitable to any spiritual good.

Others, who are hearers only, come to listen, hoping TO HEAR SOMETHING NEW and extraordinary. They are desirous of entertainment, and of having something to talk about. They want an intellectual treat, and desire not, as the chief thing, edification, and spiritual good. Ezekiel gives a very striking picture of such; (Ezek. xxxiii. 30.) *The children of thy people are still talking against thee by the walls, and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord.* They went, but did not obey.

Others, who are hearers only, MISTAKE THE MEANS FOR THE END. If they were to be asked what it is to be religious, they would probably say—to hear sermons, attend prayers, receive the sacrament, and the like. No; a man may do all these things, and have no real religion at all. They are but means of promoting religion. Real religion is, to have a constant regard to the favour of God, our reconciled Father in Jesus Christ; and for his sake to abound in disinterested and self-denying acts of love, to those most needing our care: and to watch against, and keep ourselves from the temptations and corruptions of a world lying in wickedness. *Pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

James i. 27. There are those who hear, perhaps above a hundred sermons every year, and are in the church devout and religious ; but when they leave the place where they worship, they seem to leave all their religion, and are, among those with whom they associate, worldly, proud, and passionate. These are hearers only. It has been remarked, " the profession of most men, is a mere non-renunciation of the Gospel in words, while in their hearts and lives they deny the power of it every day."

Others hear FOR THE MIND, and not for the heart and life ; they speculate, they debate, they reason, they object, they approve, they judge—but this is all. Mere knowledge of particular points of revealed truth, in an unsanctified heart, puffs a man up with pride, and keeps him at a distance from Christ and his salvation. It often happens that such *cannot endure the truth, but after their own lusts, heap up to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and turn away their ears from the truth, and are turned unto fables.* 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4. On the contrary, there are those who hear merely for THE MOVING OF THE AFFECTIONS. Do not rest in mere emotions, in pleasurable feelings, instead of being carried on to real regeneration, and devotion of the whole life to God.

Mr. Gisborne, in his Sermon on this subject, (vol. ii. of his Sermons) has described two other characters in so lively a way, that I subjoin his remarks upon them in his own words. " Many persons attend public worship merely from A REGARD TO CHARACTER. They see the neighbourhood flocking to church : therefore they go thither. They perceive that orderly and respectable persons make a point of regular attendance, and they are not unwilling to embrace the same method of being esteemed orderly and respectable. A man of this description has satisfied his wishes by shewing himself in the church. When he listens to the sermon, it is without earnestness, and with many a secret wish that it were at an end. He relapses into some worldly train of thought, until he is aroused from a vacant reverie, or from meditation on his business, or his pleasures, by hearing the joyful sound of the congregation rising to depart."

"Others SIT IN JUDGMENT upon a sermon. Swollen with spiritual pride, and deeming themselves complete masters of the most difficult points of doctrine, they scrutinize every sentence which drops from the lips of the preacher; put each of his words to the rack; examine the soundness of his orthodoxy with inquisitorial suspicion; and if they are able to fasten on an expression not precisely consonant with the niceties of their own religious phraseology, or capable of being understood, in a sense somewhat at variance with their peculiar prepossessions, deny their instructor to be evangelical, pronounce him blind, and congratulate themselves on their own scriptural attainments and keen-eyed sagacity. Eager to censure, and impatient to decide; the fruit which they reap from the return of the Sabbath is to be flattered in corruption and confirmed in ignorance."

The persons we have considered are, in the expressive language of St. James, *hearers only*. They are told of the wonderful love of God in Christ Jesus, but it never reaches, and warms, and renews the heart. They are exhorted to believe in Christ, but they never go beyond a mere notion of faith, or a dead unprofitable assent to truth. They are required to repent of their sins, but they never grieve for them, and never forsake them. They are plainly told, *Without holiness no man shall see the Lord*, and yet they seek not holiness. They are informed of their insufficiency, but they pray not for the Holy Ghost. They are urged to strive to enter in at the strait gate, but after all they go in the broad road, they partake of the spirit of the world, and are never under the practical, holy, and humbling influence of divine truth. O Christian reader, may divine grace teach us to remember, that it is not enough to say to Christ, *Thou hast taught in our streets*, (Luke xiii. 26.) and *have we not prophesied in thy name?* Matt. vii. 22. If men still remain unaffected and unchanged by the truth, if they still be *workers of iniquity*, they will perish in their iniquity.

The Apostle shews how it is that the Gospel has no effect on such; *If any man be a hearer of the word and not*

a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself and goeth his way, and straightway he forgetteth what manner of man he was. Just as the mirror shews us what we are in our outward appearance, and discovers to us any spots, or any thing unbecoming which we could not otherwise discern, so divine truth discovers to us the exact state of our hearts, and all that sinfulness and corruption which there is within us. A person may look at himself in a glass, and not remove the defects which are thus discovered to him ; but putting the glass away, entirely forget them : and so it is with such as are mere hearers. When the sermon is done, the mirror is put away by them. They have had a transient glimpse of their true state ; but they have altered nothing that was wrong, they had no intention of rectifying any thing. They mind very little at the time, and reflect less afterwards ; and continue, notwithstanding all the sermons which they hear, just the same from year to year.

It is true that the natural face of the heart, if we may use the expression, is exceedingly unclean and deformed : therefore we hate the sight of it, and love to put it far from us. The forgetful hearer, while the truth is set before him, has often short-lived convictions of his sinfulness, is displeased with himself, and thinks of altering and changing ; but no sooner is this faithful mirror taken away, than all his views of his sinfulness are forgotten, he soon loses sight of himself, and remains unchanged, and unconverted.

There is a great self-deception in all this. Such a man's attention to religious duties makes him fancy himself religious, and he thus blinds his own eyes to his true state ; he willingly shuts out the light, and perishes in the midday blaze of Gospel privileges. Satan could never ensure his destruction, did he not willingly concur with Satan by wilful blindness. Such persons do not, as they often imagine they do, much mislead others. A man who is living in sinful tempers and practices, who is neglecting his relative duties, and is worldly and earthly-minded, does not impose on the discerning. They see his profession to be

a mere cloak, and readily detect his hypocrisy; but he awfully *deceiveth his own heart.*

For instance, he hears the doctrine of salvation by grace through Christ, and disregarding the plain and declared truth, that it is a salvation from sin as well as from guilt, he thinks only of the comfort of free pardon, concludes that he is safe, because he admits a single truth, and passes by all that holiness which is ever connected with real salvation.

He hears the doctrine of faith only as the means of justification, and either wholly disregards the fruit of faith and the plain expressions of St. James, *Even so faith without works is dead being alone*, or satisfies himself with very slight, superficial, and unscriptural evidences of salvation.

He hears of the necessity of good works, and rests in his own scanty obedience; in an outward morality, without a new heart. He hears of the work of the Spirit, and thinks that he has received that Spirit, because he has had some warm emotions and feelings on religion; entirely disregarding the great proof of having received the Spirit, in the steady course of a holy life. Others deceive themselves because religious friends think well of them, and speak kindly to them, forgetting that no human judgment will clear us before God—*he that judgeth us is the Lord.*

O how fatal is this delusion! Such a man is ready to think his is especially the wise and prudent course; he imagines that there is no plan of reconciling a worldly life with the hope of future happiness, so cheap and convenient as hearing and perhaps assenting to the Gospel. When a man has persuaded himself that such an unprofitable hearing will save him, and goes on so, and ends so, how awful is the idea, that the very things on which he founded his hopes will be his ruin; the very hearing in which he trusted, and boasted, will only rise up in judgment against him to aggravate his sins, and increase his condemnation and misery. Not that it is better to neglect the word. "If men that hear the word of God and do it not, are such foolish builders, what can they be who will not so much

as hear! And if the ground where the seed perished is condemned, the ground that never receives the seed at all, will not escape a tremendous condemnation." But still, when men hear and neglect what they hear, how it opens the mouths of gainsayers and emboldens them to their imputations on preaching; they have some colour to cry out, "There are none worse, more proud, wanton, contentious, covetous, oppressing, fraudulent, than the greatest hearers. When you walk not according to the rules which you are taught, you make preaching and professing to be reputed the nursery of ungodliness and the covert for all villany. Let it not be said, 'Such hear sermons every week; but how do they live!'"

Such are some of the various methods in which persons fail of that practical obedience which the word of God tends to produce, and which is of such immense moment. How then may we avoid these evils? and how may we obtain that full and practical good which the word is intended to effect?

The Apostle James, whose writings are remarkably practical, again assists us here. He says, *Whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.* James i. 25. Christian truth is a law of LIBERTY: it shews us the way of deliverance from the bondage of sin, and of access to spiritual freedom. It finds us in worse than Egyptian bondage, guilty, enslaved, condemned, and ruined. It proclaims to us through the merit of Christ and the grace of his Spirit, pardon for our sins, and freedom from our slavery. It is PERFECT, as it reaches every case, embraces every circumstance, and nothing human can, or need be added to it, to render it more effectual. The blood of Christ alone cleanses from all sin, the righteousness of Christ alone justifies, the word of Christ is the only rule of life, the Spirit of Christ alone sanctifies. It is quite natural to us, as soon as the word ceases to sound in our ears, to lose its impressions on our hearts: therefore Moses says, *Take heed to thyself, lest thou*

forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thine heart all the days of thy life. Deut. iv. 9. He who by the grace of the Holy Spirit remembers what has been said, (John xiv. 26.) becomes acquainted with his true state, is deeply humbled under the sense of his sins, repents, believes, and obeys; gladly embraces the doctrines of salvation, and then makes steady advances in all the self-denying and arduous duties of the Christian life. He is not a forgetful hearer, but *a doer of the work.*

This DOING OF THE WORK, or, in other words, practical obedience, is the main promise of the new covenant, *I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their heart.* Heb. viii. 10. It is the aim of the Christian that his conduct should be a living and daily exhibition of the divine law. President Edwards remarked it as his experience in a happy state of mind, "I do certainly know that I love holiness such as the Gospel prescribes. It appeared to me ravishingly lovely; as the highest beauty and amiableness; far purer than any thing here upon earth, and that every thing else was like mire and defilement in comparison of it;—it brought an inexpressible purity, brightness, and peacefulness to the soul. There was no part of creature holiness that I had so great a sense of its loveliness, as humility and brokenness of heart, and poverty of spirit, and there was nothing that I so earnestly longed for." Here we see the desire of the soul of the advanced Christian. As he grows in the knowledge of divine truth, every grace advances. He becomes more simply dependant on Christ, more tender in his conscience, and more grateful to his Redeemer. He is more humble before God, and more compassionate, forgiving, and loving to his fellow-creatures. The *doer of the work* will be specially attentive in the discharge of all these relative duties, the fulfilment of which eminently adorn the doctrine of Christ. He seeks, in short, that the law should be written on the fleshly tables of the heart, and that he should be the *living epistle of Christ, known and read of all.*

Jesus Christ is the perfect model and pattern of this

practical obedience; a pattern fully set before us in his word. His people *hear* his *voice*, and *follow* him: these ever go together: it is a vain thing to think of following Christ, unless we hear his voice; and it is equally vain to pretend to hear his voice, if we are not seeking to tread in his steps.

The path which our Saviour trod was that of righteousness and ready obedience to the whole will of God. He justly said, *My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.* John iv. 34. It was a pure and heavenly course, bringing upon him the displeasure of the world; *Me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil.* John vii. 7. It was the path of humility, holiness, self-denial, and often of sacrifice and suffering. This then is the way in which the Christian must walk. If it be the way of affliction, we may well take it patiently, remembering that *Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps.* 1 Pet. ii. 21. It may be inconsistent with our obtaining the riches, honours, and pleasures of this life, though all that is really needful for us, is promised to us; (Matt. vi. 33.) yet here is an unspeakable source of comfort, it is the way that all the holy prophets, apostles, and martyrs, have gone before us; it leads us to God, our Heavenly Father, our beloved Saviour, our constant Comforter; it leads us to abiding rest and bliss. O that the promise may be fulfilled in each reader—*They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord.*

Christian reader! then let us gaze upon the Saviour, and narrowly inspect his character and listen to his words, if we would attain a practical obedience. View him, as the painter does an original picture, and as he wishes to copy all the beauties, and to transfer to his own canvas all the lovely tints, and glowing colours, and matchless form and graces that distinguish the master-painting, so let us endeavour to transfer to our heart, our conversation, and our life, all the lineaments of beauty which shine forth in

him, that blessed Master, who is altogether lovely: His compassion, his patience and meekness, his unbounded charity, his unwearied love, his faith, his devotion, his boldness in reproving sin, and his zeal for his Father's glory.

Nor let the excellence of the model lead us to despair. Much may be attained, for we have a mighty helper. It is the office of the Holy Ghost, through the ministry of the word, to make men *the epistles of Christ:* these epistles are *written, not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart.* 2 Cor. iii. 3. That sweet and gracious Advocate and Comforter comes with the word, and inclines and assists, strengthens and consoles, *those who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*

And then, how abundant is THE BLESSEDNESS OF PRACTICAL OBEDIENCE! Doing the will of God is, in the mind of our Saviour, true blessedness. We may learn this from the instructive turn that he gave to the remark on his discourses which the woman offered, who said, *Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps that thou hast sucked.* He directed those around to practical obedience as true happiness—*Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.* Luke xi. 28. The blessing of good children is perhaps the greatest temporal good; but our Lord shews that it is far inferior to the spiritual good of piety and holiness. *Who is my mother, and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand towards his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.* Matt. xii. 48—50. Hear again, too, the Apostle James—*This man* (the practical hearer) *shall be blessed in his deed,* not merely *for* it, but *in* it. The very acts of obedience bring a blessing—*in keeping his commandments there is great reward.* There is unspeakable peace, tranquillity, and comfort of mind in obedience: the testimony of a good conscience brings infinitely greater joy into the heart, than all worldly things can do: no act of

self-denial, holy love, penitence, and obedience is without its accompanying blessing of inward joy, and peace with God. The word of God is thus eminently glorified. When those who attend the word, are the best masters and mistresses, husbands or wives, children or servants; gentle, diligent, meek, obedient, humble, O how it adorns the Gospel. The Apostle presses this on wives, *To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.* Let your temper and conversation shew the good you get by hearing sermons. And then look hereafter. Our Lord declares to those duly attending to his words—*I know them, and I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.* It is the obedient Christian that will hear those joyful words, *Well done, good and faithful servant!* All those who have done the will of God on earth, shall enter his heavenly kingdom, and their works be accepted through that Saviour, by whose grace they were performed. The more closely his grace enables us to conform to his will here, the more abundantly shall we be blessed by him and with him for ever. Grace is the seed of glory.

CHAPTER X.

ANSWERS TO OBJECTIONS THAT MAY BE OFFERED AGAINST PRACTICAL OBEDIENCE.

THE subject of the last chapter is very important, and manifestly a main end of all preaching and hearing; yet the obedience there enforced is so opposed to the natural heart, that men ever raise many objections to it. Let us distinctly consider some of these objections.

There are few arguments against a religious life more plausible than this—If I attend, as the Bible requires, to my religious duties, MY WORLDLY INTERESTS WILL SUFFER—I shall displease the friends who are able and willing to assist me—or I shall offend those on whom I am dependant—or I shall lose opportunities of advancing myself in life.

This objection might be met by saying, You will not ordinarily in the result find this to be the fact. Have faith in God, and act a Christian part, whatever apparent loss it may bring; and you will find that *godliness hath the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come;* you will find our Saviour's words fulfilled—*He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.*

But the whole force of this objection has been met by our Lord on the very ground of the worldly man, on his own surmise, that he shall suffer all that he fears in this world. In these memorable words our Lord fully answers one of the most plausible arguments that the world presents against religious duties. *What is a man profited if he shall*

gain the whole world and lose his own soul ? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul ?

Let a man have every possible earthly advantage, and no abatement from pain or loss, sickness or uncertainty ; let him have all earthly wisdom, all strength, beauty, and riches ; let him have universal dominion and universal admiration ; let him have all these, with uninterrupted health and prosperity, and that for length of days, and let all these be *gained* by his own skill, wisdom and industry. No man ever had this ; but allow the supposition, and give every advantage that the worldly heart can desire, without any abatement on account of the ordinary disappointments, and daily sorrows, trials, and difficulties, to which the most favoured of men are liable and exposed, and which they have endured—allow only, what must be allowed, that it is a temporal possession, that it is but for a limited season ; and to an immortal spirit, as man is, all the glory is at once faded. In the eye of a sound judgment, it is all unsatisfying : it is but *vanity and vexation of spirit.*

But this is not all the poverty and emptiness of such a choice. *The friendship of the world is enmity with God.* There is a tremendous loss connected with the gain of the world by the neglect of religion, even the loss of the soul. If it was merely a temporal life that was to be lost—suppose, for instance, a man were to have the best advantages of this world for a single hour, on the understood condition, that at the end of that hour he was to be capitally executed ! what man in his senses would take the temporary good with such a condition ? Observe the sailor in the tempest ; he will cast over the cargo, he will cut down the masts, he will throw away even the provisions, he will spare nothing to escape death, and to save his temporal life, for a few short surviving years, it may be, full of trial and sorrow : how much more then may the Christian part with every thing to escape the loss of the soul, and to secure eternal life, through countless ages of never-ending joy and happiness !

When we fear our worldly interests will suffer, let us

realize the thought of the soul's immortality. It not only lives in the body, but when the body sinks into the dust, the soul lives, thinks, and feels ; is capable of sorrows and joys ; yes, of eternal sorrows, or eternal joys. Think then what it is to lose the soul—to be for ever miserable—for ever in darkness and despair, in pain and anguish, after this temporal life is ended ! No other evil can be imagined so tremendous, so deplorable. To lose the soul, is to lose, for ever lose, the favour of God, the glory of heaven, the presence of Christ, the company of holy and happy angels, and the blessed spirits above—it is to lose fulness of joy, and all those pleasures which are at God's right hand for evermore. To lose the soul, is to be condemned to associate for ever with accursed spirits, wicked men, and apostate angels—for ever to remain an enemy to God and his servants—and in hopeless rebellion against him, *to be punished with everlasting destruction—to go away into everlasting punishment, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.* Consider that awful description, *They shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out, without mixture, into the cup of his indignation, and shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of holy angels, and in presence of the Lamb, and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever, and they have no rest day nor night.*

In the fear of such a danger, where is the objection which we have noticed ? The very ground of that objection, that your interests will suffer, is the very reason why you should attend to the Gospel ; your very fear that you shall displease friends who may help you, should, on every principle of sound reason, lead you to repent and turn to God, that you may secure the favour of the most wise, kind, and powerful of all friends ; the very loss of temporal good which you dread, should only lead you to give all diligence to escape eternal loss, and to obtain eternal life. By *the terrors of the Lord,* which shall all be realised to the wicked, *we persuade ;* by *the mercies of God,* which are now to be

obtained, *we beseech you*, lose not your own souls, destroy not your own eternal happiness.

We have reasoned, hitherto, on the idea that you would gain the whole world by neglecting religion ; but you never will, you never can, gain the whole or the greatest part of it ; nay, do not many disregard the Gospel for the most trivial gain, or the most worthless indulgence ? O, when it comes at the last to be seen for what it was that men parted with their souls, how weak and absurd will the conduct of the wicked be found to have been ! One was afraid of hurting the feelings of his companion ; another loved his present ease ; and another wished to add a few pounds to his property. One delighted to devote his life to literature ; and another desired to gain the favour of a fellow creature of a day, though he offended the immortal Creator of all. One, for an oath that gave him no worldly profit ; another for a lie that brought him no real advantage ; one, for sensual gratification ; another, for sabbath-breaking which gave him even no present happiness, parted with an eternal inheritance, everlasting life, the crown of glory, and the bliss of heaven, and brought upon himself the condemnation of God, the misery of never-ending despair, and the torments of hell. O let the sinner talk no more of his worldly interests suffering by religion. Every interest for time and eternity suffers by irreligion ; and it only calls for faith in God's word to make us utterly ashamed of all such objections.

Another objection commonly made against a practical obedience to the word is this—I CANNOT ATTEND TO IT AT THE PRESENT TIME. Just now, I am very busy, I have many other things to think of, and it would be so unseasonable, that I cannot now think of religion : a time will come when I may have more leisure. The answer to all the solemn truths heard is, like that of Felix to Paul, *Go thy way for this time ; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.* But you forget that the present is the only season you really have—*now is the accepted time.* Can you insure a future time ? you cannot ! Can you be cer-

tain that if you neglect your eternal interests now, God will hereafter give you his grace? Oh, no! you forget that if the soul be lost, it is an irremediable loss; there is no future ransom. You forget faith and repentance are God's gifts; and if you seek not for them now when he promises them to you, he may refuse when you ask. (Prov. i.) By nature you will never have any other feeling than your present feeling of procrastination and delay; and if you trifle with God's present message of mercy, under such a pretext, you make his very mercy the reason for insulting him the more. Will it not be just then, if he never sends again to you, or never again gives you the disposition to close with gracious invitations? What if the Gospel should never more be sounded in your ears? Oh if you should never again be inclined to turn to God, but given up to a worldly heart! Look at the state of mind of one awakened to a sense of his true condition in a dying hour! What would he not give for your present season of repentance and attention to eternal interests! Whatever be your occupations, he would think them all of inexpressibly little importance, compared with the salvation of his soul. How gladly would he part with all those riches, and pleasures, and honours, for the sake of which he neglected his soul, rather than hazard his everlasting welfare! Or, supposing a man to be so stupified, or hardened through sin, as to have no such views, will he be equally indifferent in the day of judgment, or when enduring the wrath of God in endless ruin? You cannot put off that day; you cannot defer that ruin! Almighty power girds you in; there is no escaping the reach of his omnipotent arm! O think how the recollection of your present indecision, or rather, of your real rejection of the truth, will aggravate the irretrievable woe which you endure to the keenest degree of anguish. Think, patiently and seriously consider, that the loss of the soul is utterly irreparable, and can only be secured in the present moment, while God gives you the season of salvation, and surely you will be roused, and cease to trifle.

But it is again objected, I shall be COUNTED FOOLISH, AND INCUR SOME ODIOUS NAME. Allow this in its fullest extent ; but will you be really foolish to escape merely the *imputation* of folly ? *The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom ; and to depart from evil, is understanding.* Job xxviii. 28. The world is ready indeed to think that they mainly are guilty of folly who are in earnest in religion. But one would think, when the case was plainly stated, that no one could hesitate in admitting the extreme folly of neglecting our eternal happiness. Men of the world can at once tell the difference in property between a hundred pence to be received and spent in some wasteful pleasure to-day, in the place of an inheritance worth a thousand a year, certainly to be received and enjoyed on the morrow, and would count him mad who would grasp at the present pence and part with all his title to the inheritance, which he was the next day to enjoy for a perpetuity. But this folly is incomparably less than that of every worldly man. O that such men were wise, to calculate the difference between the sixty or seventy years of this uncertain and transitory life, and the more than millions, or hundreds of millions of years, that will certainly and abidingly succeed ! How great is the folly of sinful man ! At death there is nothing that he will not give for his salvation ; while during the whole of his life he hardly ever seriously thinks of it. He will do nothing, when he might gain every thing ; he wishes to do all, when it is too late to do any thing. What an illusion is here ! What an infatuation ! Is not this genuine folly ? O be not afraid of the reproach then of man. All the servants of God now in glory have endured it. Moses *counted the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.* Be assured that there is real happiness in being reviled for his name's sake ; *If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye ; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you.* 1 Peter iv. 14. It is a cheering token of our interest in him, and in his eternal reward ! *

* It has ever been the custom of those who are too prejudiced, or too igno-

Others object, I HATE HYPOCRISY; MANY THAT PROFESS RELIGION ARE HYPOCRITES. You do right to hate hypocrisy; our Lord pronounces a woe upon all hypocrites. But what if, in your present state, you yourself are a hypocrite? you profess to be a Christian, and yet live to the world; that is hypocrisy. You profess to think real religion of value, and yet for fear of hypocrisy, disguise and conceal your attachment to it; that is real hypocrisy. And what is the root of this objection—unmortified pride. You are afraid of the charge of hypocrisy being brought against you, and that you should sink in the estimation of your friends and companions. But Oh for a little moment look higher than man: God's eye is upon you. He sees through all your littleness. He detects all your sophistry. O bring no more vain excuses. Seek his favour. The hypocrisy of others only renders it the more needful and important that you who profess the Gospel should be sincere and upright before God and man.

Somewhat like this, is another objection—THE MULTITUDE ARE LIKELY TO BE RIGHT: MEN IN GENERAL THINK

rant, or too indolent to enter into the real merits of an opinion, to give the person holding it some odious name, and so condemn it without the difficulty of confutation. In this way the Heathen endeavoured to put down Christianity at first; and the remarks of Justin Martyr, in his Apology written in the second century, are very applicable to names now given to Christians in the nineteenth.

"As for our name, which is tantamount to a crime against a Christian, if we are tried upon that article, we must certainly be acquitted as very good men: but as we should deem it unreasonable when convicted of real crimes to plead a bare name only in arrest; so, on the other side, if both with respect to our name and the nature of our polity, we are found altogether innocent, it is at your door to take care, lest by unjustly punishing a people convicted of no evil, you yourselves deservedly smart for such injustice. Praise and punishment, then, cannot with reason be charged on a mere name, unless there be actions good or bad to justify the charge. But it is very notorious that when any of your own religion are brought to trial, you never punish them before you convict them; but when a Christian is indicted, you snatch at the shadow of his name for a substantial crime; whereas would you give yourselves leave to consider that name, you would find it more becoming to animadvert upon the accusers than the accused; for we are indicted by the name of Christians, but now χρηστος is a word for *kind* or *good*, and such a word cannot be a just foundation for hatred. Again, if any of the accused retract the name of Christian, you take him presently at his word, and acquit him as having nothing more criminal to charge against him; but he who has the courage to stick to the profession of his name, is certain to suffer for so doing; when the life of the professor and the non-professor both ought to be the subject of your enquiry, that the merits of both might be manifested by their actions."

AND LIVE DIFFERENTLY. Why then did our Lord say, *Wide is the gate and broad is the road that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat;* and, *Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it?* Why did his Apostles declare, *Love not the world; if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord.* Let these plain declarations speak for themselves. Remember the positive precept, *Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.* Dare to be singular for God, and he will carry you through all difficulties, to your comfort and honour here, and to your eternal reward hereafter. It has been well observed, "The world gathers impunity from the number of transgressors; the Bible shews it to be the very reason for quick-approaching and tremendous judgment. If in Sodom there had been ten, if in Jerusalem there had been one righteous, (Jer. v. 1.) they would have been spared. The Lord magnifies his power in the destruction of mighty and numerous enemies." 1 Sam. ii. 10. O recollect, that if the whole world condemn you, this will not be a reason why you should be condemned of God; if the whole world approve you, it does not make you stand one whit better in his sight who is your final and supreme Judge. *It is a very small matter to be judged of man's judgment;* he *that judgeth us is the Lord.*

But while men of the world bring their objections against a religious course, let me bring one against continuing in a worldly course, contrary to the checks of conscience. WHAT IF YOUR HEART SHOULD THEREBY BECOME HARDENED, and repentance become impracticable!

The Scriptures often solemnly caution us not to harden our hearts against the reception of the truth. Hardness of heart is a figurative expression signifying an unfitness to receive an impression, just as wax when hard will not receive the impression of the seal. It is a voluntary perverseness of mind in not taking notice of the will of God, nor applying the affections to fulfil it. This perverseness is natural to us all; but it increases and becomes an

abitual hardness, through the rejection of the only remedy for changing and softening the heart.* None are so hardened in sin as those that are wicked under a faithful ministry. Isa. vi. 9, 10. Every fresh sin adds another link to the chain that ties and binds our souls, and increases, day by day, the difficulty of repentance.

Bear then in mind the truth, that no sermon is heard in vain ; it either hardens or softens : it is either a *savour of death unto death, or a savour of life unto life.* Perhaps nothing hardens more than a mere external attendance on ordinances. To hear threatenings against sin, time after time, and yet continue those sins ; and to hear again, and again, of the love of Christ, and yet remain unmoved by that love, sears the conscience and deadens the soul.

The course of the sin, and its consequences, are well described by Zechariah : ch. vii. 11—13. *They refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their heart as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the Lord of Hosts hath sent in his Spirit by the former prophets ; therefore came a great wrath from the Lord of Hosts ; therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear ; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the Lord of Hosts.* Indeed, how can they who harden their hearts against God ever prosper ? Job ix. 4. God is their enemy, and who can be their friend ? The case of

* There are some things that appear like this sin, which do not really indicate it; and this calls for more express notice, lest humble and contrite Christians should be needlessly distressed. Some are anxious because they have not had grievous terrors and alarms on account of their sins ; others because they cannot weep at the recollection of their guilt ; and others because they feel dull and heavy in religious exercises. But these are no certain marks of final hardness of heart. They may spring from totally different causes, such as natural constitution, a peculiar course of God's providential dealings, &c. Some, whose hearts are for a season hard, afterwards have become simple-hearted and devoted believers. Matt. vi. 52. Many previous sins make way for the great sin of finally rejecting God's word with a hardened heart. Men willingly admit prejudices against the truth, they come under the influence of false principles, and in love with their sins, they *choose darkness rather than light,* yield to their corruptions, and cleave to earthly and sensual objects. Such men are sinfully careless, and indifferent about spiritual things; wilfully and perseveringly cast off convictions of duty, and obstinately cling to carnal things in preference to the things of God.

Pharaoh is left on record for our instruction. He refused, time after time, to hear the voice of God by Moses; he gradually became more and more hardened, till at last God gave him up to his hardness; *the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh*, and he miserably perished. There was here a judicial hardness of heart inflicted upon him, in just punishment for his repeated rejection of God's word. *It is a fearful thing*, Christian reader, *to fall into the hands of the living God*, and to be given up by him to a hardened heart, and a reprobate mind. If you hear not to-day, your heart will to-morrow be more hard and indisposed to hear. Look at the state of the Jews. For above seventeen hundred years they have been scattered and dispersed, a proverb and a bye-word among all nations, and that for this very sin, refusing to hear the word of God. Look at the dreadful regions of eternal woe, and one mark of its miserable inhabitants is, they hardened their hearts against the voice of God speaking to them, through the works of creation and providence, or in the word of his grace.

Some, after long rejection of the Gospel, have, at the close of life, felt the excellence of religion, and the value of repentance, and have found, too late, that they could not repent. We have a record of one who in the agony of his last days said,—"Were Christ to assist me, I should repent; but he has justly withdrawn his influences from me. I have so often crucified him afresh, and put him to open shame; and so often grieved his Holy Spirit, that God has left me to a spirit of impenitence, and given me the certain earnest of a fearful inheritance in another life." He left this world with the agonizing expression,—"O the insufferable pangs of hell and damnation!"

If you would avoid such a woe, continue not a worldly course against the checks of your own convictions; cultivate a tender conscience. Do not act against the sober judgment of your mind. Do not stifle your convictions, by plunging into carnal pleasures, and sensual indulgences. Do not listen to infidel or irreligious principles. Grieve not the Spirit of God. Quench not his holy and blessed

influence on your mind. Meditate on what you hear. Compare it with the word of God in private. Pray over it, and examine yourselves by it. Come to the house of God, continue there, and return from it in the spirit of prayer. Above all, seek constantly the gracious gift of the Holy Ghost. He softens the hardest heart. He produces convictions of sin. He shall remove all your doubts. He will convince you of the weakness and sinfulness of all worldly objections. He shall enlighten the eyes of your understanding, to *know what is the hope of his calling and the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.* He sanctifies by the truth; and in the very hearing attracts, wins, and purifies your soul. O look for his teaching, and live under his influence, and you will find the hearing of the word powerful and efficacious to your soul's eternal good: and then, so far from objecting to practical obedience, you will say with David, *O how I love thy law!* or, with a greater than David, *I delight to do thy will, O my God.*

But, O blessed Spirit, in vain do we address the understanding and the heart, and make it palpably plain that the service of God is the only path of wisdom: thy grace is alone sufficient to make men walk in that path: unless thou thyself teach the heart, we prevail nothing: descend thou upon the writer, and upon the reader; and then indeed we shall be wise unto salvation!

CHAPTER XI.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER.

THIS parable so directly regards the subject of this Treatise, and is so full of the most important instruction, that it may be desirable to discuss it, distinctly and particularly. We will first give the account we have in the three Gospels of this parable, (Matt. xiii., Mark iv. and Luke viii.) in the way of harmony.*

Hearken! behold, there went out a sower to sow his seed. And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it: and some fell on stony ground, upon a rock, where it had not much earth, and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up it was scorched, and as soon as it was sprung up, because it had no root, and lacked moisture, it withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprung up with it, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. And others fell on good ground, and did yield fruit, that sprang and increased, and brought forth; some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred-fold.

And, when he had said these things, he cried, and said unto them, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear. Hear ye, therefore, the parable of the sower. The seed which the sower soweth is the word of God. And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when any one heareth the word of the

* The author refers the reader to Muir and Stennet on this parable. He has taken several thoughts from those writers.

kingdom, and understandeth it not, then Satan, the wicked one, cometh immediately, and taketh away the word which was sown in his heart, lest they should believe and be saved. This is he which receiveth seed by the way side. And these are they likewise which received the seed on stony ground, on the rock: who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it, with gladness; and have no root in themselves, and so believe, and endure but for a time, and afterwards, in time of temptation, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended, and fall away. And these are they which received seed among thorns: such as hear the word, and when they have heard, go forth, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and pleasures of this life, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful; yea, they are choked, and bring no fruit to perfection. And these are they which received the seed into good ground, such as hear the word, and understand, and receive, and keep it in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience, some thirty-fold, some sixty, and some an hundred.

Our Lord's explanation of this parable makes its general design obvious to all. By the sower, is intended the ministers of his word; by the seed, his word; and by the ground, the heart of man. The reader will observe the seed was all sown at the same time, by the same person, and was all of equal goodness. The whole difference was in the state of the ground. We will then consider separately the particulars noticed with reference to the different kinds of ground, on which the seed was sown.

Sect. I.—*The Way-side.*

This description points out to us the heart of the careless hearer. Seed sown by the way-side is scattered on ground that is grown hard, by being frequently trodden upon, and so is quite unfit to receive it; and it is soon either destroyed by the feet of passengers, or devoured by the birds of the air.

What a picture is this of the state of a careless hearer!

Such a person hears the word as others do. He is not among those who despise and neglect it altogether. He does not fly from sermons, but listens to them ; and yet it is only occasionally that he hears. The seed is sown as it were accidentally : from some worldly motive or other, he has been led to hear, but he is not at all prepared to receive what is spoken in a right spirit. His mind has never been broken up, and cultivated by penitence and prayer, by thoughtfulness and reflection. While he hears, it is in a heedless and desultory manner ; little regarding what is said, and in no way anxious to retain, remember, and improve it. In St. Matthew it is said, such a one *heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not.* Though he hears, he takes no means truly to comprehend what is said, and to be edified by it. It makes no abiding impression. What is scattered is trodden down ; some fresh event or other, puts it out of his thoughts ; divine instruction is treated by such persons with indifference, if not with a degree of contempt. Their minds are occupied with something else ; and instead of reflecting on what they hear, they are thinking of " something which they have seen or done, or are meditating on some new plans, some fresh pursuit, some scheme of business, or pleasure, and thus scarcely give the word any attention, or attend only to the manner of its delivery." No wonder, then, that such obtain no solid views of divine truth, and are unimpressed, and not benefited even by a revelation from God himself.

But the consequences of hearing in this way are most ruinous ! *the Devil cometh, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved.* When worldly men ridicule the notion of an apostate malignant spirit, mighty to tempt and injure the soul, they directly oppose the word of God. The Bible clearly reveals this truth, and expressly asserts it. Our Lord spoke the words to which we have just referred, in the *explanation* of the parable, and therefore without a figure. Our great enemy can hardly desire a higher advantage over us, than that he

should succeed in leading us to disbelieve his existence. The most certain mode of conquest is to persuade my enemy to undervalue my strength, and to ridicule my ability to injure him. A knowledge of the existence and power, the skill and resources of the enemy, will make us watchful against him. This subtle, and wicked, and powerful spirit has access to our hearts; aud though he cannot injure us without God's permission, and cannot force us to sin; yet he is ever watchful to seize advantages against us, and to prevent the due effect of the word. Careless hearers abundantly give him such advantages. Little do they think, while they are sitting unconcerned about the solemn truths of the Gospel, that Satan rejoices in their indifference, and improves it to the utmost. That great adversary is ready to inject into our minds innumerable vain and foolish thoughts, in order to keep us from attending to the one thing needful. He diverts our mind from the word when preached, or prevents our recollecting it afterwards. Or perhaps he has preoccupied your mind with prejudices, and hardened it against the word, so that you are not disposed to listen to what is said, or compare it with the word of God. Your eye, or ear, or imagination is caught with some object, that "insensibly carries you out into a train of thought different from and opposite to the things which are spoken, and so you pursue and follow out in your mind schemes and employments of another character."

Our Lord notices that the hateful design of Satan is to prevent our salvation—*lest they should believe and be saved.* Faith coming by hearing, and salvation being inseparably connected with faith, if you reject the word of God, you remain in your natural unbelief, and are in danger of perishing for ever. O dreadful malice of Satan! O inexpressible folly of man! he throws himself into the temptation and snares of his chief foe, and willingly casts away his only remedy.

But it may be useful to expose more fully the devices of this enemy. If you heard attentively, and were mindful

of the solemn truths delivered to you ; if you thought of them duly, and weighed them deliberately ; this is the ordinary course in which God imparts the gift of faith to man. Your doubts would be removed, your prejudices dispelled, and your judgment convinced. Your hearts would receive the impressions of the good Spirit, and be led to embrace the great salvation provided in the Gospel. You would learn your sinfulness, and your danger, and would be brought to rely simply on the Lord Christ for salvation, and so be filled with joy and with peace in believing here, and your precious and immortal soul would be eternally saved. This salvation is a blessing above all price, including pardon, righteousness, sanctification, and eternal life. It is a translation from sin to holiness, from misery to happiness, from the sentence of a justly-merited and eternal vengeance, to the free title and full hope of everlasting felicity.

Now the cruel and envious design of Satan is to rob our souls of all this happiness. *He who was a murderer from the beginning*, would shut up our souls in unbelief, that we may perish in eternal ruin, that we may be for ever tormented with him in the dread abode of eternal woe. Guard then against his devices. Remember, that the Gospel is the last, and the only remedy of ruined man. If you reject it, *there remains no more sacrifice for sin, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation.* Satan, filled as he is with malevolence, doubtless rejoices in your anticipated misery. O gratify not that malignant fiend ! O grieve not the good Spirit ! O be not accessory to your own perdition ! Shut not your own eyes, close not your own ears, to the way of salvation, and Satan cannot prevail against you. Be careless no longer. Be attentive to hear. Be diligent to pray. Meditate on what you hear, and you shall be saved : for the form of expression, *lest they should believe*, shows that while hearing there is a hope that you may be saved. Satan would not be so active, if he saw no danger of losing his prey. Cry then mightily for help, and though your heart be as the way-side, it shall

be ploughed up, and prepared for the good seed. You shall *believe and be saved.*

Sect. II.—*The Stony Ground.*

This description points out to us *the heart of the temporary* hearer. He goes farther than the careless hearer, but still stops short of salvation. The effect of the word on him indeed at first is wonderful. The seed is hardly sown before it springs up, and appears flourishing and prosperous ; but nothing really valuable is produced.

The figure is very expressive ; the ground is hard and stony, covered with a slight soil, and having no depth of earth. Such is the corrupt and hardened heart of man by nature—such is his natural perverseness and obstinacy. He has what Ezekiel calls *the heart of stone,* or what St. Paul calls, *the carnal mind* which *is enmity against God.* There is some earth in which the seed may be sown, but there is no depth in it. This seems to point out those warm natural feelings which form a temper that we often meet with, not unfavourable to the reception of new and striking truths and doctrines. There is a warmth of heart and feeling which gives many advantages for a ready attention to the truth, but alas ! there is no stability. You see, sometimes, a lively imagination, but no judgment to correct it. There is often a deep sensibility, so that many tears flow at a moving statement, and yet there is nothing permanent. Such an one *receives* the word. He does not carelessly disregard and neglect it, but he gladly welcomes it. Indeed, in St. Luke it is said, he *for a while believes.* There is an instantaneous assent of the mind to the truth. He counts not the cost and difficulty ; but at once entertains a favourable opinion of it, and professes it before others ; and this *immediately.* There is a certain eagerness and earnestness about such a mind that allows not of patient waiting and reflection. *Forthwith they spring up.* It is not the most speedy appearance of religion that is always the most genuine. He does not compare the doctrines which he hears with the word of God, to take them

upon a divine testimony, or to *prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good ;* but he takes his sentiments from human authority, and is mainly influenced by the person he hears, and the manner and address of the preacher. His feelings are soon wrought upon, and he manifests a flaming zeal, and seems far to outstrip the humble, meek, and lowly Christian. He has, with this, much *joy.* He seems to enter at once into a new world. Without previous contrition and humiliation, and without the Christian graces which mark the believer, he takes up the groundless notion that he is a child of God, and thence vainly imagines that all the promises belong to him. The conceit men have of their own religion, is often a real impediment in the way of salvation. Hence the *publicans and harlots enter into the kingdom of God before* the Pharisees. Matt. xxi. 31. Indeed, self-deceiving in spiritual things, is the ruin of vast multitudes in every age. The doctrines of the Gospel, so truly blessed, and a blessing to the contrite heart, fill the temporary hearer with an intoxicating sort of joy, without any previous deep conviction of sin, or any just idea of its real evil and dreadful malignity. He may, alas ! delight himself in the thoughts of the love of God, and never have any real share in that love.

But lest any sincere Christian should be discouraged, it may be observed, that the character which we have noticed may be distinguished from the real Christian in various ways. The Christian, it is true, receives the word, and is filled with joy ; but his joy is preceded by a sense of his guilt, and by mourning for sin, and repentance, and is followed by the fruits of righteousness. The result, however, most strongly shows the difference between the two. The temporary hearer soon fails and withers. The seed does not continue growing, and rise to the full size, and bear the ear and the fruit.

The reason is, they *have no root in themselves.* Among the first operations in nature towards growth, the seed sown opens its prolific bosom, in order to the procession of

the root. The root catching hold of the surrounding earth, strikes deeper and deeper, and becomes more and more firmly united to it, and spreads far and wide on every side, drawing up moisture for the sap, and nourishment for the whole plant. But it is not so on the stony ground; the root cannot shoot, or spread, and so the plant withers and dies. Such hearers may be compared to a beautiful flower cut from the plant, which when put in water will flourish for a few days, and appear as gay and beautiful as if still growing in the garden united to the original plant, whose root was deeply seated in the earth; but bye and bye all is lost. So it is here; there is no root. There is no real piety within, no new *heart;* no considering and digesting what is heard; there is no renewed spirit; no subdued will; no rightly-enlightened judgment, and therefore nothing that can stand the assault of temptation.

Then comes the scorching sun of temptation. A profession of religion before the world, and an undeviating course of uprightness exposes the real Christian to persecutiou. All the disciples of Christ endure this in the way to heaven. No one can faithfully profess the Gospel without experiencing opposition and difficulty. If there be real religion, these things, through the power of the Spirit, will only make it thrive the more. They will rapidly bring on and advance the work of grace; but if there be no real piety, all mere animal feelings are soon chilled. The strength of the natural man ever fails in the spiritual conflict. It vanishes like chaff before the wind. *They are offended;* they cannot bear the cross. They like the joys of religion, but shrink from its self-denial and sacrifices. They want a religion without trouble, reproach, and suffering; and not finding this, they *fall away.* They are determined to run no risk, as they think, for the truth's sake. The excitement of the passions from the novelty of the subject soon ceases. Their zeal evaporates. Some new object engrosses their attention—*His goodness is as the morning cloud, and passeth away as the early dew.* As it

quickly rose, so it quickly withers. Unexpected sorrows and privations occur. They looked for applause, and honour, and cannot bear reproach and obloquy. They looked for ease and respectability, and meet with toil and contempt. Thus, unless the special mercy of God interferes, they wholly fall away. *If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking-for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversary.*

We see several instances of this falling away in the word of God. Multitudes followed our Saviour for the loaves and fishes; but few adhered to him to the end. When he came to the self-denying part of religion, they said—*This is a hard saying, who can hear it! and they walked no more with him.* When he preached at Nazareth, while he spoke on the blessings of the Gospel, *they wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth:* but no sooner did he begin to apply the truth to them, and refuse to gratify them according to their own notions, than they endeavoured to throw him headlong from the brow of their hill. These things are full of practical instruction to us. Let us remember that religion is a serious concern. It is not a thing merely to amuse us, or to gratify our present feelings. It is a business of life or death. It calls for patient and persevering application. *He that endureth to the end, the same shall be saved.*

Christians are, however, sometimes in danger of being too much discouraged by trials, instead of being excited and quickened. They sometimes groundlessly write hard things against themselves, and without just cause infer that their religion is false, unsound, or hypocritical. But, Christian reader, if God has given you sorrow for sin, a dread of falling, an endeavour to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, real dependence on divine grace, and a true desire to be holy—all these things distinguish you from the temporary hearer, and should shew you that *he who has begun a good work in* you, *will perform it to the*

day of Christ. Only let your fears lead you to much prayer, and you shall obtain such abundant grace as will in time remove every doubt.*

Sect. III.—*The Thorny Ground.*

Our Lord now pourtrays by another similitude the heart of *the worldly* hearer. There is an advance beyond the other cases. The seed is not devoured as soon as scattered by the way-side, nor does it wither away as soon as it springs up, as in the stony ground; but it continues to grow for a time, and yet ultimately, like the two former, it brings no fruit to perfection.

It is true, that the hearers thus compared hear the word and receive it. It is not heard without effect; there is a visible result, an outward profession of religion, and probably a considerable knowledge of it. Such may be considered by the world as steady, and sober, and judicious Christians, free from all enthusiasm, who have attained the happy art of joining the world and religion together. Many external good actions may be done by such hearers; they bear the appearance of fruit, but as it is asserted in St. Luke, *bring no fruit to perfection;* there is not the right motive, nor the right temper and disposition. Such a hearer fails in that which God mainly regards—the state of the heart, and the inward graces of the real Christian. He *goes forth,* striving to proceed in a course of joining religion and the world together, hoping to get riches, honours, and the pleasures of this life, and yet not to lose heaven. Our Lord mentions in this case three things as hindering the success of the word. Let us notice them more particularly.

1. *The cares of the world.* It is necessary indeed to think of, and labour for our subsistence in that station of life in

* Quesnel hae the following prayer in his remarks on thie part of the parable: Seigneur, Mon ame est devant vous comme une terre sane eau: que la pluie de votre grace tombe eur elle, et y fasse naitre cette source de larmee de la vraie penitence. (Luke viii. 6.) Ah Seigneur! que se ne soit pas pour un tems que je vous ecoute, que je goute votre parole, que je soie a voue, maie pour toujoure, pour l'eternite! (Matt.)

which God has placed us, and to make a limited provision for our families. This, so far from being sinful, is a Christian duty, which we could not neglect without sin. We are *not* to be *slothful in business.* But observe the expression, the *cares* of this world—all undue anxiety and solicitude about worldly good, whether in rich or poor, will eat out the life of religion. When the things of this world occupy our constant thoughts, and our whole mind is engaged about them, we cannot profit by hearing the word. A poor man is in danger of this, who, knowing not from day to day how his family shall be provided for, forgets what our Saviour has said—*Take no thought for your life. what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.* A man in business is in danger of falling into the cares of this world, especially when he undertakes more than he can get through, and so his mind is perpetually distracted by the multitude of earthly cares. Nay, in the commonest affairs of life, we may be led away by these cares. Martha was cumbered with much serving, even when Christ himself was the visitor and the preacher, and met with that reproof—*Martha, Martha, thou art troubled about many things, but one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part which shall not be taken from her.*

2. The *deceitfulness of riches* also hinders the success of the word. Riches, it is true, have their value, and are among the gifts and talents which God bestows, and when rightly used, are profitable to the possessor and others. But here is their deceitfulness. We overrate their value, and we rest in them as capable of procuring happiness. We fancy them good in themselves. We imagine that we can obtain them by our own skill and prudence. We use them as though they were our own. When the mind is engaged in the pursuit of heaping up riches, it is in peculiar danger of self-deception. Diligently seeking worldly property is a sober, respectable, and approved sort of thing, and may in a certain way be pursued without a man's losing his religious character in the church. It does not, like the sins of the flesh, openly condemn a man to others. But

the word of God speaks decisively; *If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him—they that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.* Christian reader, watch against this subtle snare of the tempter. There is something infinitely better, worthy of our whole desire and eager pursuit, even durable riches and righteousness, the favour of God, and the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

3. *The lust of other things entering in* is the last hindrance which our Lord mentions. He does not on the one hand design to forbid the grateful enjoyment of the blessings which he has bestowed, but the irregular and inordinate desire and abuse of them; nor does he, on the other hand, merely guard us against pleasures absolutely sinful in themselves, as gluttony, drunkenness, and the like, which are totally at variance with any reception of the sacred word; but he especially guards against those pleasures that are in themselves innocent, but which become sinful when we make them the chief object of our anxiety and pursuit. Thus ease, comfort, and pleasure, are the great desire of many; and to obtain these, all other things are sacrificed. The term *entering in*, describes the way in which the temptation comes; not by breaking through, nor by assailing and forcing the way; but by insinuating, and familiar, and unsuspected means, gaining access to and possession of the heart. Such persons are *lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God.* They cannot bear those self-denying duties which interfere with, or thwart their spirit of self-indulgence and self-gratification. O reader, a single, momentary sinful pleasure may cost your soul more than you can regain all your life. The expression, the *lust of other things*, apart from the *desire* of *the sincere milk of the word*, shews how the minds of men are led astray. They see some worldly object, they fancy that there is a real and superior good in it, a desire after it is indulged, it enters their mind, it fills their hearts, and so the word is choked. Dr. Owen says, "Men feed their lusts high until they

loath the word. Quails often make a lean soul. A prosperous outward state has ruined many a conviction from the word ; yes, and weakened faith and obedience in many of the saints themselves. Love of this world made Demas a leaking vessel. Many might have been rich in grace, had they not made it their end and business to be rich in this world,"

These three hindrances prevent our profiting by the word, as they deprive us of all our leisure, leaving no time for spiritual things, even as thorns leave no room for the wheat. They are perpetually in our thoughts. They mingle with our private and our public devotions, and how can the word grow? They fill our religious hours with distractions that prevent all comfort, and tempt us to abridge and cease from all religious duties. Christians, if you *will* have the world, it must be at the expence of your immortal souls? Though the form of religion may not be laid aside, that very form will only tend to harden and deceive your heart. Watch against such enemies with more vigilance than you guard your house against expected thieves.

The whole of this hindrance is well pourtrayed by Dr. Stennett, in his account of this parable. He says, " Wealth becoming a man's object, and its deceitful charms getting hold on his heart, the prize will continually be in his eye, and the means of acquiring it engross all his thoughts. His speculations, reasonings, deliberations, and efforts, will all be directed to this point. Now he is laying his plan, adjusting each circumstance, considering their various and united effect, and providing for all contingencies that may arise and thwart his views ; and then you see him carrying his plans into execution with unremitting ardour, setting each engine at work, and looking forward with eager expectation to the event. If he succeed, his passion for wealth collects fresh strength, and without allowing him to pause a while to enjoy the fruit of his labour, pushes him on to some further exertion. If he fail, the failure stimulates him to some bolder enterprize. And thus he is employed

from day to day, his thoughts incessantly wandering from one object of sense to another, his invention perpetually on the rack, and his passions like the raging sea in a continual agitation."

"Now amid this tumult of the mind, how can a man think soberly of the great truths and duties of religion, of the state of his soul, and the concerns of another world! If we could suppose him in the least degree well affected to religion, (which indeed is scarce imaginable) it were yet almost impossible for him to pay proper attention to it. Perhaps the form is not wholly laid aside; but what is it more than the form? He *draws nigh to God with his mouth, and honours him with his lips, but his heart is far from him.* Matt. xv. 8. When on his knees, he is still in the world. When he is worshipping God in his family, he is still pursuing his gain; his closet is a counting-house, and his church an exchange."

The affecting result of these hindrances is, that the word is choked. Such a person, though he goes much farther in outward religion than the temporary or worldly hearer, does as really ruin his soul and as assuredly perish, as if he neglected it altogether. How affecting! how deeply miserable! to come near heaven, and after all to fall short —to do much, and yet just too little—to have some of the pains and sacrifices here, and none of the real and eternal reward. Mr. Scott remarks, that "such professed Christians often draw their hopes of heaven from the Gospel, but their present comfort is derived from the world. The kingdom of God and his righteousness are placed last; and the getting, keeping, and spending of deceitful riches, or anxiety about secular affairs, rob them of their time, and at last of their souls; for unless the Gospel render us fruitful, it will never bring us to glory."

O let us not have more to do with the world than duty clearly requires. *Whosoever will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.* Heaven, with all its pure and holy joys, is the Christian's object of desire, the prize of his high calling, and should be the main pursuit of every human

being. Entangle not yourselves, then, with the affairs of this world. In large cities, in a commercial country, and in a period of much prosperity, the danger of the cares of this world is but little regarded, and it leads to a fatal issue with multitudes. Do not attempt to gain, as many do, a little more of the world, at the extreme peril of your immortal soul. Root out those thorns and briers that would choke the word. Receive the good seed in a prepared heart. The Saviour's cross viewed by faith, as your foundation of every hope, will shew you the evil and danger of all sin, and will enable you to overcome the world. Nothing else will do this. 1 John v. 5. The grace of the Holy Spirit will bring his death home to your heart, and so enable you with Moses to choose *rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.*

Sect. IV.—*The Good Ground.*

Under this comparison our Lord describes the heart of the *sincere* hearer. It is important in considering this character to observe, first, that as the ground, before it is good and fit for the sower, must be ploughed, and prepared for the seed ; so it is with regard to the heart of man. Each heart is by nature, bad, very bad : *deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, or diseased.** This is the description, not of any particularly wicked individuals, but of *the heart* in general, and therefore of the heart of every man. *Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.* This is the state of the ground, naturally, every where. *There is none good, no, not one.* Let us submit to the plain word of God ; and remember that this description is confirmed by the experience of the most holy men. There is need then of an entire change. The ground of the heart is made good only by the work of the Holy Spirit, regenerating a man, convincing him of sin, and producing in him

* אנש : Jer. xvii. 9, dicitur de corde, malitia veluti morbo gravi et aegre curabili affecto. Simon Heb. Lex.

true faith and repentance. God has promised this to those who ask it—*A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.*

The first great change in the soul, this renewal in *the spirit of our minds*, (Eph. iv, 23,) is indeed effected through *the word of truth.* James i. 18. Many a one coming to the house of God, or hearing the word in other ways, with a heart very unprepared, has by his mercy been awakened, quickened, and regenerated by the power of the Holy Ghost, in and through the word thus heard. And many who have been among the way-side, stony, or thorny-ground hearers, finally are made like the good ground, through that word which they long neglected.

But besides this regenerating efficacy of the word by the Divine Spirit, there is a sanctifying and fructifying power. The good ground is the converted heart, through the fresh supplies of the Spirit, rightly receiving and profiting by the word. It is called honest and good, not only to distinguish it from the unconverted heart, but as these terms well describe the simplicity and sincerity, the love and humility with which such an one receives truth coming from God himself. Where the heart is good and honest, there will be no vain cavils and objections against the truth. Inattention, and careless and worldly thoughts, will be resisted and overcome ; the word is received, and has a corresponding influence.

Such are described as *understanding* the word. They see its excellence, they feel its value, they comprehend its truth, and discover its glory. They know it in its practical use. Their understanding of it is experimental and influential. They also *keep* the word. They retain it in their memory, they think upon it, revolve its truths over and over in their minds, and long to embrace it so fully with their affections, that it may influence their whole lives. They unite with David in his prayer, *O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes !*

They bring forth fruit. This is that which most especially distinguishes them from others, and proves the reality

of their religion. Real fruit comes not from man's power. The language of the Saviour to his Church is, *From me is thy fruit found.* The outward appearance of it may be in others ; but the genuine fruit of the Spirit is only produced by the power of that Spirit in the hearts of the children of God. What this fruit is, the inspired writer fully declares, (Gal. v. 22.) *The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.* The fruit is of the same nature with the seed that is sown. As the Gospel is all grace, and love, and kindness, so it produces those tempers and dispositions where it is received. As it discovers to us the glories of Jehovah, so it produces reverence, humility, and contrition before him. As it shews the Son of God crucified for sin, so it produces every sort of good fruit, hatred of sin, fear of offending ; faith in Christ, love to God, and love to man. Wherever the Gospel of the grace of God is truly received, it teaches a man *to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.* Not that any individual Christian is perfect—alas ! as many a promising ear is blighted, so often in the very graces for which he is eminent, at times he fails most, as we see in Moses and Job. But in every case fruit is produced to God's glory.

This fruit is brought forth with great variety—*some thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred-fold.* It is manifest that there are very different degrees of fruitfulness among real Christians, according to the grace bestowed upon them. Look, for instance, at Abraham, the father of the faithful, simply and entirely devoted to God ; and Lot, only just escaping from Sodom. Look at Paul, abounding in every good work, and then at Mark, shrinking from and declining danger, though at a distance. There are different degrees of talent, opportunity, and ability given to man. The fruitful Christian to whom affluence is granted, will bountifully spread around the blessings which God has bestowed on him. He will provide for a fatherless family, will sustain a sinking household, will assist or maintain an

impoverished minister, will support a pious youth at school or college, will largely distribute useful publications, materially aid religious institutions, and be the foremost in every plan devised for the real benefit of mankind. The fruitful Christian in poverty, however, shews the same mind by patience, industry, integrity, and personal kindness to all around, ever being ready to afford such help to others, as his own many wants will allow. But there are different degrees of personal religion. If we are careless of prayer, and negligent of the Scriptures, and other means, we do not obtain that large gift of the Holy Ghost, which is the only efficient and energetic principle of this fruitfulness. As the Holy Spirit works within us, so shall we be fruitful in every good word and work. Let us then seek that Spirit diligently, so shall the seed grow, and the blade spring up, and the stalk be richly laden with the precious fruit, not merely having a scanty ear, here and there, but bringing forth plenteously. Thus let every part of our life be *filled with fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God.*

This fruit is said to be brought forth *with patience :* that is, with constancy and perseverance day by day. There may be a shew of fruit in others for a season : the Christian only endures and perseveres. With him there is first the blade, then the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear. The progress of his religion is thus evident. There is not the full ripe fruit, as soon as the shoot appears. No ; there is a gradual growth of the plant. Many a storm must beat around it, many a shower descend upon it, many a beam of the sun shine upon it, before it is ripened, and brought to full maturity. Those beginning the Christian life, may be encouraged by this to persevere, amid every difficulty. Perhaps some of my readers may be disheartened by their unfruitfulness, and ready to give up every hope ; but only persevere ; you may at times seem retrograding like little children in their learning, who for weeks even, may appear to be going back ; but still persevere, pray more, read the Bible, *walk in the spirit* more, and all

shall yet be well. Storms and tempests may beat around you, but they shall only strengthen the roots of divine life, and the warm beams of the sun shall not wither, but ripen the fruit.

We need not dwell on this fruitfulness as comforting the believer with a satisfactory evidence of his own salvation, preparing his soul for heaven, benefiting his fellow-creatures, and glorifying him who gave his Son to die for us. It is manifest that this is the only truly happy character of the four descriptions noticed by our Lord.

But if neither the way-side, the stony, or the thorny ground hearer obtains a real blessing, what is the state of those who wholly disregard this great salvation ? An emphatic and double condemnation rests upon them—*This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.*

May the whole subject lead us to watch over our hearts in hearing ! If the author may judge of others by himself, there is much of the way-side, stony, and thorny-ground remaining, even in those who have in some degree obtained a better state. The ground which has been hitherto waste, wants culture ; and that which has been cultivated, wants more cultivation : or, to speak without a figure, we all need more of the Divine Spirit ; more faith, humility, brokenness of heart, contrition, seriousness, and earnestness in hearing.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PROMISED UNIVERSAL DIFFUSION OF DIVINE KNOWLEDGE.

It is cheering, amid that wide-spread spiritual darkness which still covers so large a portion of the earth, to recur to the promises of God's holy word, and look forward to that bright and happy period which has so long engaged the hopes and entered into the prayers of the whole church. It is a subject too nearly connected with this work, and too pregnant with hope and happiness, to be omitted.

Regarding the efforts of Christians of every denomination, and the success which God has given to every prudent exertion in every part of the world, the author observed some years since that it seemed as if the long, dark, and dreary night of Paganism was passing away. The more he has seen of the state of the world, the more he entertains this delightful hope. We may discern the general softening, the evident appearance of the dawn clearing away shades and darkness. We may behold manifest tokens that the Sun of Righteousness is arising with healing in his wings on a benighted world. The first streaks of his approach already paint with lively hues the distant horizon; the morning is spread on the mountains; a cheering and comforting tinge glows in the Eastern sky; the Western catches and reflects again the brilliant rays: the edges of the clouds grow brighter, and become gilt with resplendent lustre; and while the shades of Pagan

darkness recede, the people that walked in that darkness shall, in every part, see the Light of Life, and rejoice in his glory. Would any stop his progress ? Men may sooner hinder the advance of the splendid luminary of the heavens, than retard the march of that infinitely more glorious and beneficial Luminary which is the *Light to lighten the Gentiles,* and shall yet *be the glory of his people Israel.*

Nor is confidence here, either enthusiasm, or presumption. It is but sober, and reasonable expectation of the fulfilment of prayers, which every Christian from the time of Christ has daily made ; it is only unfeigned faith in divine promises perfectly clear and explicit. *The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.* Isa. xi. 9. *They shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord : for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.* Heb. viii. 11. While the Church prays, *Hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,* God promises, as the happy result of all his dispensations, *the kingdom, and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him. Hitherto is the end of the matter.* Dan. vii. 27, 28. Similar promises, to a great extent, might easily be added.

It will be evident, from these and other passages, that the conversion of the world is closely connected with the diffusion of divine knowledge.

It may be asked, What is THE PRECISE BLESSING THAT WE EXPECT ? and this may be the more reasonably asked, as there certainly have been many carnal and earthly expectations of a temporal kingdom and glory, which the word of God does not sanction. There are necessarily considerable difficulties in giving any opinions on unfulfilled prophecy ; the only guide is the written word, and it has not pleased God to gratify curiosity in a variety of particulars. Yet enough is stated to cheer and gladden every

Christian, and to animate him to the most strenuous efforts. But let us confine our views to that specific point, which is more directly connected with this treatise, the diffusion of divine knowledge.

The knowledge of the Lord shall be GENERAL; it shall cover the earth, *as the waters cover the sea.* As the sea spreads universally over the bed or channel which it covers, so broad and so extensive shall this knowledge be over the earth. Jeremiah expresses it thus: *They shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.* However this may have been partially accomplished, its extended fulfilment is yet to take place. Such promises may not intend universal conversion, but manifestly point out a general diffusion of divine knowledge in every land, and among all classes. Monarchs, rulers, and princes, shall be enlightened by divine truth, and rule according to the principles of the Divine Word. All in authority, noblemen, senators, judges, magistrates, ministers, and parents, shall be taught of the Lord. All in subjection: labourers, mechanics, servants, and children, shall not be rude, and ignorant, and openly wicked, but educated in the fear of God, and instructed and informed by scriptural knowledge.

The knowledge of truth shall be DEEP as well as general. The figurative promise, The earth shall be FULL, &c. *as the waters cover the sea,* implies not only universally diffused, but copious, abundant, and abiding knowledge. There will probably be a growing depth in this divine knowledge, like the symbolical waters which issued from the sanctuary, which after one thousand cubits reached to the ancles, and after another to the knees, and then to the loins, and then the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over. Ezek. xlvii. 1—5.

Religious knowledge has from the beginning, though with many drawbacks in different periods of the Church, still, on the whole, been advancing. The knowledge which Adam had of the great truths of revelation, and the divine glory thereby developed, was doubtless less than of Moses; of Moses than of David; of David than of spiritual Jews,

with all the prophets complete ; and of the Prophets of the Old Testament, than of the Apostles of the New Testament. Hence while our Lord magnifies John the Baptist above all former prophets, he still says, *He that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he :* (Matt. xi. 11.) he has more religious knowledge, and greater spiritual advantages. He also tells his disciples—*Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see ; for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.* Luke x. 23, 24.

But in the latter-day glory of the Church, this light, and these advantages, shall greatly exceed any thing yet enjoyed. It is predicted, that, *the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations,* shall be destroyed. Isa. xxv. 7. *The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days.* Isa. xxx. 26. After describing the joy spread by the messengers of salvation preaching good tidings, it is said—*They shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion.* Isa. lii. 8.

The diffusion of this knowledge shall ALLEVIATE EVERY EVIL. Much has already been said on this. (See chap. ii.) Let it be remembered, that all evil of every kind, we as sinners justly deserve ; but all alleviation, and each removal of evil, we do not deserve. Persons have sometimes wondered, why an Almighty Father, full of wisdom and love, should create a wasp that stings, a serpent that poisons, and a tiger that devours. The wonder rather is, that every creature of God should not be armed with weapons, to annoy sinful beings like men, and that any creature should be permitted to serve him, or be a comfort and benefit to him. When we have rebelled against our Creator, every evil is merited, and all good is utterly unmerited. We deserve pain, and sickness, and suffering ; we do not deserve the skilful physician, the healing medicine, watchful attendants, and affectionate relatives ; all this is from the free and gratuitous mercy of our Beneficent Father.

O how wonderful will be the triumph of this mercy and forbearance over man's apostacy and rebellion, when creatures, and circumstances, and dispensations, now armed and in array against us, shall have their very nature and direction changed, and be made harmless and innocent, objects of delight, and means of benefit and happiness! Nor is this mere theory and imagination. Isaiah, in all the glow of eastern imagery, but with all the truth of divine revelation, exhibits this consequence of the universal diffusion of divine knowledge—*The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.* Isa. xi. 6—9. See also Isa. lx. &c.

Christian reader, let us realize the blessings of that day of millennial glory which is before the church, its peace and tranquillity, its love and harmony, the glory which it brings to God in the highest, and the good-will which it diffuses among men; and can we but strive, and labour, and pray for its accomplishment?

This divine knowledge shall also be INFLUENTIAL TO ALL PRACTICAL GOOD. It is not a merely speculative knowledge of truth, such as a man may have of a science, which never influences his temper, or regulates his moral conduct, which is promised in such passages as Isaiah xi. 9, and Hab. ii. 14. Divine knowledge becomes a governing, leading, and holy principle; the spring of every thing good. St. Paul says of it, *I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord . . . so that I may win Christ and be found in him.* Phil. iii. 8. He calls it the *savour* of the *knowledge* of Christ. 2 Cor. ii. 14. To the self-condemned sinner, who has in vain endeavoured to

obtain relief by his own works, and who at length apprehends Christ, *made sin for us, . . . that we might be made the righteousness of God in him,* (2 Cor. v. 21.) this knowledge is as life from the dead. To the distressed, tempted, and burdened spirit, relieved by a view of Him who *is touched with a feeling of our infirmities,* it is a fragrant perfume, reviving the fainting heart ; his *name is as ointment poured forth.* Sol. Song i. 3. To the advanced believer, to whom *to live is Christ,* and who is daily and hourly looking to him, amid labours of love in his cause, it is the one thing which he determines to know, (1 Cor. ii. 2.) and under the constraining influence of which he daily gives up himself, and lives, and labours, for him that died for our sins. 2 Cor. v. 14.

We may hope that this practical influence of divine knowledge shall be general. In that day of which it is said, *The Lord shall be thine everlasting light,* it shall be added, *Thy people shall be all righteous.* Isa. lx. 20, 21. *The Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all nations.* Isa. lxi. 11. And then, in the fullest sense it may be said, *The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to* ALL *men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.* Titus ii. 11, 12.

And all this influence of divine truth, has a most important bearing, as it respects eternity. The effects of the knowledge of the Lord thus diffused, are not confined to time. The kingdom of Christ is an everlasting kingdom. Other empires, however glorious, relate to a transient world : they soon pass away. But this only commences on earth, and the subjects of this kingdom live for ever with their king in the glory above. Here they are prepared and made meet for enjoying perfect happiness for ever above. Death is to them the gate of life, and the translation to the glorious capital, the very presence chamber, the beatific vision of Immanuel, the King of Glory. God our Saviour declares, *This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou*

hast sent. John xvii. 3. It is the same happiness in kind, that will be fully enjoyed hereafter; it is glory begun in the soul; it is the commencement of eternal life. Where this is, there is a meetness and preparation of mind for death, and judgment, and eternity. Death brings us to the actual sight, and the full joy, and glory of our often-proved Helper and Saviour: the Judge is our advocate and our friend; and eternity is all a never-ending scene of boundless, and growing, and ineffable happiness.

One further observation may be added respecting this divine knowledge, that THERE IS A SPECIAL PROMISE OF DIVINE TEACHING with reference to it. After the glowing description given of it in the 54th of Isaiah, of the enlargement of the church by the accession of Gentile converts, it is promised, (ver. 13.) *and all thy children shall be taught of the Lord.* An infallible interpreter applies this to divine teaching. John vi. 45. It is also the great and cheering promise which God has given in the new covenant—*they shall all know me.* Jer. xxxi. 34.

Surely then there is light, life, and glory reserved for the Church, that must far exceed all our hopes; there are mercies in store for mankind, which shall make this lower world as *a garden which the Lord hath blessed.* The promises of God have secured them to us, and the providence of God must therefore accomplish them.

Having thus cheered the heart by pointing out some particulars of the precise blessing which may be expected, we are more prepared to consider the difficulties in the way of its accomplishment, the means by which those difficulties shall be removed, the peculiar signs of our own times, and the duties to which we are called.

What are THE DIFFICULTIES, whether in the Christian or unchristian world? They are various and multiplied; and, to unaided human power, quite insuperable; but not really insuperable, for God works by man, and with man, in every effort to advance the kingdom of his Son.

Let us then look without dismay at the present low state of religious knowledge in the whole world. Its actual ig-

norance and misery will only furnish the Christian with motives to exertion, and will finally afford more illustrious occasion and opportunity for the display of divine wisdom, power, and love, in the removal of all. The Lord of all seems to have permitted the great enemy to have entered into every land, to have long reigned over Heathen countries, to have strengthened himself in his possessions by every power that he could attain from lengthened experience, only that as on an arena, large as the whole earth, and visible to the whole creation, he might receive that signal overthrow from which he shall never recover: when *the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.* Isa. xl. 5.

Take then the prophetical description of the world—*Darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people.* Isa. lx. 2. Take the Apostle's account, *the whole world lieth in wickedness,* (εν τῳ πονηρῳ, in the wicked one,) 1 John v. 19. It is admitted, that the Papal* and Mahomedan Antichrists have overspread countries where once pure Christianity flourished. It is admitted, that in the most favoured Christian country, or the most religious town in that country, we are very far from the happy state which God has promised, and there are great difficulties every where in advancing divine knowledge. Each faithful minister feels this. There is a natural averseness to divine truth in every bosom; religious education does not necessarily remove this, and the ordinary course of education strengthens and increases it. The great multitude of professing Christians dislike the holy and humbling truths of Revelation; and often those having influence and authority, entertain unfounded suspicions against the faithful declaration of Divine Truth, as injurious to the welfare of the country, and hence they oppose it in every way.†

* Lord Bacon says, "If a hue and cry was to be raised after antichrist, and the Pope was to be taken up in consequence of it, and brought before me as a justice of the peace, I should consider it my duty to commit him, as having all the distinguishing marks by which Antichrist was described, and to put him upon his trial."

† The remark of the reformer N. Ridley, respecting Paul's imprisonment

But in heathen lands, even where Christians have sway or influence, and especially where they have neither, these difficulties to the diffusion of Divine Truth are much augmented. The religion of their forefathers for untold generations; the long-continued habits of idolatry and iniquity; the chains of caste, or learning, or barbarism; the hardened heart, and the seared conscience, and the blinded eyes of the millions of benighted gentiles all around, mutually confirming and strengthening each other in an error, delightful to the carnal heart, gratifying to pride and sensuality, strengthened by every early association, and every relative affection: O, these present mighty obstacles! We feel them, we sigh under them, we acknowledge our utter impotence. None can have been in, or know the true state of Africa or India, Turkey or Persia, China or New Zealand, even with the liveliest faith, without seeing, and without feeling that there are strong barriers to be forced, ere the word of the Lord can have free course.

The man of the world says at once, "The thing is quite impossible: It is not only utterly impracticable, but to attempt it is dangerous aud mischievous." What would such have said to the twelve Apostles, beginning to labour for the conversion of mankind, unprotected by temporal power, and persecuted in every place? What would they have said to the Reformers, commencing the Reformation? Yet look at the conduct, even of men of the world; in worldly things, by courage and activity, they triumph over apparent impracticabilities: it has been eloquently said, "The whole of the British Empire in India is a series

nnder Nero, for preaching the Gospel, is as true now, as in the days of the reformation—

"See how sometimes devilish persuasions are hrought into the heads of high princes and rulers, yea, persuaded unto them, as here was to Nero the Emperor, that the preaching of the Gospel of Christ should he the destruction of his realm, and the cause of rebellion of the subjects against their heads and rulers. Whereas there is nothing that is more for their salvation, than is preaching God's word; for that is the mean hy which God hath ordained to save his people, and nothing more keepeth the people in good order, and in due ohedience, with all humility and subjection to their heads and rulers, than the word of God truly and sincerely preached." It is no new thing that men *will not endure sound doctrine*, and *turn away the ears from hearing the truth.* 2 Tim. iii. 3, 4.

of impossibilities accomplished : " O how will their conduct in worldly things refute their views in spiritual things, and reproach the Christian's lukewarmness in the cause of God !

But we will give the worldly man every advantage which he claims. We will allow all his natural impossibilities. Nay, more ; we can tell him that there are difficulties of a still more severe and arduous character, of which even he knows nothing. He knows not that there is a fallen nature at enmity with God, and his word. We must admit this. He sees not that there is a spiritual adversary. mighty, and subtle, and malignant, having undisturbed sway in heathen territories. We must admit this. He thinks not of the weakness and corruption of every human instrument which man can employ. We fully admit this. Do you then ask, How can we possibly expect any success ? on our own shewing, are there not spiritual as well as natural impossibilities ? and must it not be concluded to be impossible ? No, O man of this world, throwing all these things into your scale, you are utterly mistaken in your calculation. *God is not in your thoughts.* You leave the Creator, and Governor, and Disposer of all, out of his own world. He has commanded his servants to commence this work ; he has promised to remove every difficulty. *Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.* Isa. xl. 3, 4, 5. This work is one of those things of which it may be truly said, *With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.*

Bring then into the strongest light all difficulties and obstructions. We would not have one kept in the back ground. Difficulties yield, and are surmounted, when superior wisdom, strength, riches, and power, concur in Him who has to meet the difficulty. Now this is the case with

Christians in all efforts to spread the Gospel; for He who has *all power in heaven and earth*, says to them when engaged in such efforts, *Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.*

But the Scriptures give us intimation as to THE MEANS BY WHICH ALL DIFFICULTIES IN THE WAY OF THE UNIVERSAL DIFFUSION OF DIVINE KNOWLEDGE SHALL BE REMOVED. We will notice three special means.

(1.) The PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL of Jesus Christ. This is an engine despised by the world, and wielded by weak instruments, yet powerful, through God, to beat down every obstacle; and wherever it is perseveringly applied, with his blessing it brings to nought and vanquishes every difficulty. Those who had tried this engine under amazing difficulties, say of it, *The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strong holds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and beinging into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.* 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. The divinely-appointed method of converting mankind, is, *Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature.** We would not enlarge on this point, having before dwelt at length on it. See chap. iii.

* The above remarks are thus confirmed in an able publication, entitled, "The Advancement of Society in Knowledge and Religion," by James Douglas, Esq.; a book taking large views, and having valuable suggestions.

"Of all methods for diffusing religion, preaching is the most efficient; other methods are indirect and preparatory; but the simple proclaiming of the Gospel, has in all ages been attended with the most transforming efficacy, elevating the few who have cordially accepted it, into a higher and happier state of being, and even raising the many who have rejected it, into a better system of moral opinions. It is to preaching that Christianity owes its origin, its continuance, and its progress; and it is to itinerating preaching, however the ignorant may undervalue it, that we owe the conversion of the Roman world from Paganism to primitive Christianity; our own freedom from the thraldom of Popery, in the success of the Reformation; and the revival of Christianity at the present day, from the depression which it had undergone, owing to the prevalence of infidelity and of indifference. Books, however excellent, require at least some previous interest on the part of the person who is to open and to peruse them; but the preacher arrests that attention which the written record only invites, and the living voice and the listening numbers, heighten the impression by the sympathy and enthusiasm which they excite; the reality which the truths spoken, possess in the mind of the speaker, is communicated to the feelings of the hearers, and they end in sharing the same views, at least for the moment, and in augmenting each other's convictions."

We here however take the term 'preaching the gospel,' in a large sense, as including the circulation of the Scriptures, the diffusion of pious books and tracts, the religious education of children, visiting and instructing the poor, and all those varied and invaluable means by which the truths of the Gospel are now brought before the human mind.

There are promises distinctly pointing out this as the means of accomplishing the hope of the church. The reason why *all nations shall flow unto the house of the Lord* is this, *for out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem :* (Isa. ii. 3.) *at the time of the end*, it is predicted, *Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.* Dan. xii. 4. Before the hour of God's judgment, and before Babylon falls, the Apostle says, *I saw another Angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.* Rev. xiv. 6. The words are remarkably full and express, as to the universal preaching of the Gospel through all the earth, and are supposed by judicious commentators, to have especial reference to the means to be used for the evangelizing of Papal* and Heathen countries.

(2.) THE REMOVAL OF THE TEMPTATIONS OF OUR SPIRITUAL ADVERSARY. Now Satan has, by means of false religion and error, immense sway in every land : he is still, *the Prince of the power of the air, the Spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.* Eph. ii. 2. He is full of activity and vigour, and full of diligence and exertion. *He goeth about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may*

* Preaching will be the only effectual overthrow of Popery. It was the main engine of ths Reformation. Take away preaching, and an immense advantage is given to Popery. The Romish worship, with all its shew, pomp, and pageantry, has, in its best attire, infinitely more attractions to the senses than the Protestant. Their gilded crucifixes, thsir beautiful pictures, their fine images, their splendid vestments, their long processions, and the varions orders clothed in their respective dresses, all strike the eye : and with it is often found the most exquisite sacred mnsic, and every thing calculated to move and influence the natural man. The power of the preached Gospel, which alone meets the true, the deepest, the spiritnal wants of man, and affords rest to his burdened conscience, as it is God's own and only plan, so it can alone adequately and with success contend with, and triumph over such attractions, and dispsl "ths fascinations of the Romish Charmers."

devour. 1 Peter v. 8. Every word here is expressive of his indefatigable efforts to destroy us. He is called *the God of this world.* (2 Cor. iv. 4.) a tremendous description of his power. He is the great leader of all enemies that oppose Christians in diffusing the Gospel. Eph. vi. 12. But all this power shall come to an end. Our Lord, with the eye of prophetic joy, exults in this—*I beheld Satan, as lightning, fall from heaven ;* (Luke x. 18.) and his Apostles record the promise, *The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.* Rom. xvi. 20.

But in the last book of the Holy Scriptures, we have a more express prediction on this subject. St. John says, *I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit, and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till a thousand years be fulfilled.* Rev. xx. 1—3. This can mean nothing less than a peculiar and effective, and general restraining of his power, over the whole earth, infinitely beyond any thing yet given to the church. O who can tell all the evil that will be thus restrained ; all the devices and snares, by which men have been deceived and blinded, that will thus be removed ; and all the good that will thus have free course !

(3.) But we freely allow, without a farther means, the difficulties which have been named could not be removed. There is a farther assistance yet promised to the church, THE GENERAL EFFUSION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, which shall give effect to the preaching of the Gospel, and overthrow Satan and his temptations, and furnish life, and strength, and holiness, for every good and perfect work. However the word of God may be *as a fire,* or like *a hammer* to break *the rock in pieces ;* (Jer. xxiii. 29.) we see by many instances of those who live under the most faithful exhibition of that word, that it does not necessarily, and invariably, produce spiritual benefit. The hammer requires a hand to wield it ; the fire requires to be applied ; the Holy

Spirit alone makes the Gospel efficacious—*Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power.* Psalm cx. 3. Admit to the full extent the power of our spiritual adversary, and that being now opposed, he now especially rages; but still *shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him;* (or as it is in the margin, *shall put him to flight.)* Isa. lix. 19. Admit that the church is now in a low and desolate state, it is only *until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness shall be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be counted for a forest: then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field, and the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness shall be quietness and assurance for ever.* Isa. xxxii. 15—17. (See also Isa. xliv. 2, 3; Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.) So our Lord promises to send the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, and declares, *When he is come, he will reprove,* (or rather, as in the margin, *convince) the world* (not a few individuals, but in the result, the world,) *of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.* John xvi. 8.* This effective and almighty worker is promised in especial reference to the object which we are considering —the universal diffusion of divine knowledge in the last days: *It shall come to pass, in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams, And on my servants, and on my hand-maidens, I will pour out in those days of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.* Acts ii. 17, 18. We see in the primitive church the divine beauty and vigour of this gift in its first communication, and the promise belongs *to all that are afar off, as many as the Lord shall call.* Acts ii. 39. And with this promise, whatever difficulties may appear to the eye of sense, the eye of faith dis-

* By judgment here seems especially intended our sanctification by victory over our spiritual enemies. See ver. 11, and Matt. xii. 20. In Usher's Twenty Sermons, fol. p. 139, and 158, this passage is explained.

cerns them all surmounted, and, like the divine Author of faith, *calleth those things which be not, as though they were.* Rom. iv. 17.

Let these means be in full operation, and how mighty and extensive must be the conquests of divine truth!

Such being the means by which difficulties shall be removed, it may be again asked, Have we any immediate interest in these things? may they not be events far distant? are there any evidences that the means by which difficulties shall be removed are now in more extensive operation? We reply, We have a direct and present interest in these things. There are SIGNS OF THE TIMES, and means now in operation, which may lead us to the most cheering hopes, and call upon us, *Look up, and lift up your heads.* Luke xxi. 28.

Let us then briefly advert to one or two of the signs which distinguish the present day. Every Christian should discern the signs of the times. Our Lord strongly reproved those who neglected to do so. Because the Scribes and Pharisees disregarded this duty, they rejected and crucified the Lord of glory; and we too may lose many advantages and incur great guilt, if we disregard the present state of the world, and the prospects held forth to us in the Holy Scriptures.

The SIGN OF PROPHECY is, perhaps, the most important of all, *whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts.* 2 Pet. i. 19. We say the most important, because we can have no certain knowledge of future events, but as it pleases God to reveal them to us, and had he not led us to expect at a particular period the blessing which we are considering, we should have no sufficient ground of assurance that we might confidently look for it. We do not speak of a precise year, or many years, more or less. We pretend not to predict particular *times, or the seasons which the Father hath put into his own power;* (Acts i. 7.) but the general result has been revealed by Him; He has shewn us that it shall be proclaimed, *The*

kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever. Rev. xi. 15. And he has also further revealed, for the use of the church, various particulars respecting precise periods of time which *the wise shall understand.* Dan. xii. 10. For instance, many of the prophecies of Scripture are chronologically arranged, and one of the ultimate earthly events predicted, is the universal extension of the Redeemer's kingdom: (Dan. vii. 27, 28; Rev. xx. 4, 5.) it is an event therefore which is yet to take place. A grievous apostacy was predicted. The Son of Man was not to come, *except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.* 2 Thess. ii. 3. The witnesses were *to prophesy a thousand three hundred and threescore days,* (i. e. 1260 years,) *in sackcloth.* Rev. xi. 3. That apostacy we have seen take place; and in the ordinary lapse of time, the 1260 years cannot be far from closing, if they have not closed. The word of God, therefore, encourages the most cheering and lively hopes, as to the future state of the church. Intervening trials and judgments may undoubtedly be looked for;* but all will be well to the righteous, and glorious and happy will be the issue to the church. Though there may be differences on minor points, the great body of learned Protestant commentators, as Mede, Sir Isaac Newton, Bishops Newton, Halifax, Hurd, and Horsley, Mr. Scott, Faber, and many others, agree in their sentiments respecting the speedy approach of those three leading events which eminently mark the period of the conversion of the

* Mr. Donglas speaks thus with reference to prophecy—"Prospects the most cheering may be overcast, and the progress of improvement at once arrested by one of those sudden revolutions which mock all calculation, both in their arrival and in their results; but thongh in matters merely political, snch changes in the state may baffle the fairest conjectures which proceed upon the supposition of the continuance of national prosperity, yet, in the expectation of religious improvement, we have more certain gronnd to rest upon. We know not whether God intends the stability of particular nations; bnt we know that he makes all revolutions subservient to the introdnction of his own kingdom, that the appointed years of delay are now elapsing, and that the time to favour the Gentiles is at hand." He afterwards says, "According to the sure word of Prophecy, allowing for the variety of interpretation, before the oak which was planted yesterday shall have reached its full maturity, the whole earth shall have become the garden of the Lord."

world, viz.—the downfall of Popery, the destruction of the Mahomedan imposture, and the conversion of Israel and Judah.

The SIGN OF PROVIDENCE corresponds with that of prophecy. There have, it is true, at different periods, been bright hopes of this blessed day. In the apostolic age, when the gift of tongues, and the power of miracles were bestowed on the church, Christianity made such rapid progress, that the blessing then began to be expected. In the time of Constantine, when the power of the Roman empire was given to the cause of Christ, then it seemed not unlikely that his religion would be every where received. And at the Reformation, when the pure light of truth again burst forth with primitive splendour, and rapidly spread throughout Europe, there seemed another hope that it might reach the farthest limits of the earth. But the fulness of time was not come. The period foretold by Daniel and St. John had not been completed, and the present era presents far more solid and scriptural reasons why we may hope that this event is not far distant.

The heathen world, in all its vast extent, is more and more opening to the efforts of Christians, preparing to welcome, and in many parts earnestly desiring Christian labourers; and those in authority in heathen lands have greatly promoted missionary undertakings. Christian nations have everywhere a growing intercourse with, and a preponderating influence over heathen nations. To Christian countries God has given vast political power, and most power to those nations, such as Britain and America, where his religion is purest,* and to whom he has at the

* Strong marks of the purity of a Church are—its high reverence for the Holy Scriptures; its close adherence and unqualified submission to the word of God; and its zeal to spread the Gospel. Cecil says, "Take the Church of Rome:—what a glorious church was the Church of Rome! but when? when it followed human imaginations in religion? No! it was a glorious church when the Apostle wrote his Epistle to the Romans: its faith *sounded throughout the world.* Thus was it, too, among Protestants, when they first separated from the superstition of Rome, and followed the word of God instead of human imaginations; in purity and zeal they walked with God, and glorified him on the earth; they triumphed not in their lives only, but in their deaths at the stake: but see them following vain imaginations, and however they might reflect on the Papist's superstition, the Papist might pity them for denying the Lord that bought them." See his Sermons.

same time given zeal to labour in his service. This zeal has been manifested in the Protestant Church by the formation of above forty distinct religious institutions, chiefly within the last thirty years, raising nearly £500,000 a year for diffusing divine knowledge.

God has also given to Christian nations new facilities to communicate his truth. While the principle of general education has been recognized, the new system of mutual instruction, with its ramifications, in infant and adult schools, first spreading in our own country, is now diffusing itself with extended blessings through the heathen world. The printing press * now seems in some degree, to meet the want of that which distinguished the apostolic age, the gift of tongues, and new improvements give to that vast engine for diffusing divine truth an increasing power of immense advantage. Modern inventions come in to aid intercourse among the nations, and the progress of the Gospel. Each fresh discovery in arts and in science pays tribute to the Saviour, and facilitates his work. A state of general peace, almost through the world, and of outward rest from its various enemies, gives the church every advantage for exertion.

If we take also a very cursory review of the progress of missionary efforts, it may well lead us to lively hope. Remember the torpor and death on this subject fifty years back ; remember the accounts formerly given of the innocence and happiness of various heathen conntries, and observe the change of feeling now !

The actual state of the heathen is so generally known among Christians, as to refute all that infidels and others have alleged, of the simplicity, excellence, and purity of man without the Gospel, and to excite greatly-enlarged feelings of sympathy and compassion for their real dark-

* Foxe in his Acts and Monnments, dwells at some length on the importance of printing,—" herehy tongues are known, knowledge groweth, judgment increaseth, books are dispersed, the Scriptnre is seen, &c., &c. By this printing, as by the gift of tongues, and as by the singular organ of the Holy Ghost, the doctrine of the Gospel soundeth to all nations and countries under heaven : and what God revealeth to one man is dispersed to many, and what is known in one nation is opened to all." Page 650, Edition 1610.

ness, and wickedness, and misery. The cause of missions now excites an interest among all those who have any pretensions to the name of Christian. Such a missionary feeling has been roused, that several hundreds of Christians have in the last thirty years rejoiced to leave their country, and have devoted their lives to labour for the conversion of the heathen. The means employed by the societies which have been formed are various and extended—such as the preaching of the Gospel in heathen languages; the translating, printing, or circulating of the Scriptures, in one hundred and forty-two different tongues or dialects; the instruction of many tens of thousands of heathen children; the introduction of female education; the forming of many seminaries and colleges for training up native teachers; the calling forth from obscurity of numbers of estimable men, qualified by eminent and peculiar gifts, and employing them in a high and holy work, each in spheres suited to his talents. Never before could that promise, *Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased*, (Dan. xii. 4,) be said to be so amply and extensively realized as it is in the present day. It is peculiarly verifying by events continually taking place. The success already given to this work, under each society, is amply sufficient to demonstrate the possibility of accomplishing the whole when it shall please God to pour out his Spirit. The missionaries have in great numbers practically exhibited the spirit and genius of Christianity, in the midst of those heathens who had before seen little but its dishonour by the lives of worldly and dissipated Europeans.

The different missionary societies have acquired much valuable experience respecting the difficulties of this work, and the most proper instruments to be employed. Christians of different denominations that have taken a part in this work, have had a growing esteem and affection for each other, which has very perceptibly united those that love the same Saviour and his cause much more to each other.

In addition to this, it can now be truly asserted that

many thousands of the heathen in different parts of the world, in Western and Southern Africa, in India, in the South Sea Isles, in the West Indies, and in America, have already been by these efforts converted to Christianity, and great numbers have died in the Lord. The whole work of the conversion of the world, notwithstanding some disappointments, continues year by year to advance and increase, and all the efforts, prayers, and charity which have yet been expended in this cause, are already amply repaid, and more than repaid.

But the most cheering sign of all is, that in the midst of the great increase of external exertion, God's servants on the one hand feel and acknowledge that the church of Christ is by no means yet duly roused to the importance and magnitude of the work, and to that enlarged spirit of prayer and exertion to which we are called: and on the other, have been disposed by his grace more generally to renounce all dependance on outward preparation, or on any power, save the power of the Holy Spirit. And though there be yet but little of a general spirit of supplication through the Christian church, who can count the increased number of fervent prayers now offered up by individuals, or the thousands of little societies that meet weekly, monthly, or quarterly, to pray for the coming of Christ's kingdom? From whom does this spirit of prayer come? Can it possibly be offered up in vain? Shall it not be still more enlarged? Oh may the sacred flame of Christian intercession spread, and grow, and increase, till all *that make mention of the Lord keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth.* Isa. lxii. 6, 7.

A minute survey of the unchristian world, Jewish, Mahomedan, and Pagan; or of the Christian world, Greek, Roman, or Reformed, would shew us much indeed to move our sympathy, and to mourn over; but much also to sustain sanguine hope, and excite to zealous exertion. In every profession of religion there is a general excitement

and movement, that must issue in great results; perhaps in arduous conflicts, before the day of final triumph.

Thus, if you look at the means by which divine knowledge is to be diffused, and all difficulties removed, those very means are in extensive operation; the Gospel is preached to a vastly increased and increasing extent, and the spirit of prayer is enlarged for the subverting of Satan's dominion by the abundant effusion of the Holy Spirit. It is a high honour, Christian reader, to have been born in such a day, if we do but discern and rise to our privileges and discharge our duties. The present are evidently peculiar times. Let us, as God opens the way, throw our talents, our time, and our whole energies into them.

We cannot close the subject, then, without referring to those DUTIES TO WHICH WE ARE NOW CALLED, both individually and nationally.

As INDIVIDUALS, may it be our serious concern each to know and obey the truth for himself. Little will it profit us that the world shall hereafter be converted, if we, in the mean while, fall short of so great a salvation. We shall enter at length on this subject in the following chapter. But the remarkable character of the present day, seems especially to call Christians to decision of character. It is not a time to halt between the church and the world. It is not a time to delay and put off this great concern. Let us join ourselves heartily and decidedly to the Lord and his people. Bear now the reproach of his cross. His religion is not yet above shame and contempt from man. Now then we may prove our fidelity—now we may manifest our love to him—now is the time for probation. He is coming in his providence to punish his enemies, and to bless his people. He will discriminate between those who serve him, and those who serve him not. Let us then take a decided part, and be firm and bold in the cause of God. Never strive to join together both the world and the church, as if, by some happy dexterity, you could secure the favour and good of both. It never will, it never can answer.

Come out, and be separate, as, when you appear before your Saviour, you will wish you had. Confess him, and own him, and he will own you in the great day of his appearing.

As a NATION, how important is the present situation, and means, and circumstances of Britain! Elevated beyond every other country for this purpose, what an opportunity has England, the storehouse of all that is excellent, the spiritual granary of the world, the moral Pharos holding forth the word of life to all nations, what a vast advantage has England at this moment to bless mankind! She is called to a higher office than the deliverance of Europe from the ambition of an earthly usurper who laid it low. She is called to help in delivering the whole human race from the more dangerous and destructive tyranny of Satan, a worse adversary; and from the more ruinous and galling bondage of idolatry and heathen superstition. O that there were but given to us from above, something of that courage, and effort, and largeness of contribution, which marked our struggle with our earthly enemy! and O that our hearts were but animated with as extended, but a more pure and holy zeal against this more malignant foe, this infinitely more tremendous, because in its consequences more ruinous and more enduring evil! What Christian heart does not long for this! What Christian patriot can breathe a higher wish for a beloved country! Then would Britain, in a nobler sense than she has ever yet been, be a benefactor to the world; then would her name be enrolled in the annals of all nations as blessed; and then would she wear a brighter crown of glory, through all succeeding ages, than ever she has yet attained.

The Lord enable us all to discern the signs of the times; to devote ourselves to his cause; to give first ourselves to him, and then our talents, our time, our influence, and our substance, freely and liberally, to diffuse his Gospel among all nations. Let us share the sacrifices, and the labour, and we shall assuredly partake in the final triumph, and all the Saviour's perfect and eternal glory.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DANGER OF NEGLECTING DIVINE TRUTH.

It is the common opinion of men of worldly minds, that it is entirely optional with them, whether they will hear the word, or not; that they may do just as they please, and no evil will result from neglecting to hear. As far as regards human punishment, this may be very true; but there is a far more serious evil than any human punishment whatever, connected with this neglect.

We have all a living and palpable evidence of this. Look at the race of men who are *a proverb and a bye-word among all nations*, and have, for hundreds of years, been *only oppressed and spoiled evermore*. Once they were prosperous; once it could be said of them, *Happy art thou, O Israel! who is like unto thee?* and what is the reason of the change? They *despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy*. In reading the prophecies of the Old Testament, and the reasons of the captivity, it is very observable how frequently the prophets dwell on this, as the great reason why the Jews were rejected from being the people of God; they disobeyed the voice of the Lord, and discarded his prophets. And if we look at the true cause of the calamities which have since befallen the Jewish nation, the destruction of Jerusalem, their dispersion among all nations, and their being every where base, degraded, and insulted, we shall find a similar cause,—they knew not in their day the things belonging to their peace, and rejected

the words of Christ and his Apostles, till at length God's long-suffering and patience were exhausted ; and made way for his righteous indignation and tremendous vengeance.

Such a history, with such an inspired account of the real cause of all their calamities, is pregnant with solemn admonition. Every Jew that we meet seems to proclaim in our ears, Take heed that *you* now attend, in this *your* day, to the word of God ? While your privileges are continued, lay hold of them ; while your day of trial is prolonged, be diligent ; while you have opportunity, believe and obey to your eternal salvation !

The danger of neglecting divine truth will appear more clearly from considering, first, the excellence of the salvation proposed to us. We will, then, notice the sin and danger of disregarding it.

The message which Christian ministers bring is weighty enough to call for all our attention. The glorious truth which they have to declare is nothing less than the highest evidence of divine love that we can imagine—*God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

Consider a little the greatness of the salvation proposed, that we may more adequately estimate the danger of neglecting it.

From what a misery it rescues us ! All men are transgressors of the divine law. The great Creator, the King eternal, is justly offended with us. He, who is truth itself, has even declared that transgressors *shall go away into everlasting punishment, prepared for the Devil and his angels.* Consider, then, our true state ! Look at the infinite holiness, the inviolable truth, the almighty power, and undeviating justice of God ! See how his righteous law condemns every human being ! Who shall stand before him, when he is angry ? If God is our enemy, every other being is armed against us, and we are defenceless in a world of enemies. Who could rescue man, and preserve God's honour and justice untarnished ? It is the excellence of the blessed spirits above to prefer the Divine glory to every

thing else. Suppose then, as it has been observed, the holy angels, filled with love and pity to man, had set about planning his restoration. "Upon the first discovery that it would clash and interfere with the glory of God, (as every contrivance of finite and limited wisdom would have done) they would instantly have cast it from them as an abominable thing, and have rested eternally in the contemplation of his excellences." Let sinners be pardoned and saved, and what shall become of the justice and holiness, the power and veracity of God, all of which are engaged to see a meet recompense of reward rendered to every transgression? To be under the vengeance of divine justice, the terror of Almighty wrath, the sentence of eternal punishment, and all so justly merited, that every mouth shall be stopped! only consider your real condition, your tremendous danger; and then you will see the greatness of that salvation by which you may be rescued from it.

In what a marvellous way it was accomplished! It occupied the council and purpose of God himself before the world began. Eph. i. 4; 2 Tim. i. 9. It was foretold of God, and expected by prophets and righteous men for four thousand years. It was announced by angels from heaven. The only Son of God, *the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person*, adopts the astounding humiliation of taking upon him our nature, and that in its lowest form. He appeared as a little child; he grew up on our earth; he lived as a man of sorrows; and at length shed his most precious blood, dying the painful and accursed death of the cross, and all to accomplish this salvation. The Holy Spirit concurs in carrying on the glorious purpose, conveying and applying to each individual the mighty blessing. When the sacred writers speak of this salvation, they describe it as being great and marvellous, "the wisdom of God," his "manifold wisdom," and "all the treasures of wisdom." The whole scheme, contrivance, and working out of this salvation, are of such stupendous grandeur, and so full of unspeakable interest to us, that in nothing does the inexpressible ignorance and

darkness, folly and impiety of the human heart more appear, than in the neglect of it. A worm of a day treats with contempt that which God planned from all eternity, that which angels unceasingly contemplate with admiration, and that which will be the song of the redeemed through the everlasting ages of heavenly joy.

WHAT BLESSINGS ARE IMPARTED THROUGH IT, EVEN IN THIS WORLD! There is treasured up in Jesus Christ, the fountain-head of this salvation, a rich supply for all our wants. Through him we have the gift of the Holy Spirit, of regeneration, repentance, faith, and holiness. Then there is pardon and righteousness, justification and peace with God, a hope full of immortality, full of joy. This salvation shews us, even here, God our Father, our Friend, and our Portion; Christ our Redeemer, our Shepherd, and our Saviour; the Holy Spirit our Sanctifier and our Comforter; the blessed angels our ministering attendants; Satan vanquished, the world overcome, and the kingdom of heaven opened to all believers. Consider how freely the blessings are bestowed—without the least tittle of deserving in man—*by grace—not of works.* Eph. ii. 8, 9. Consider how extensively the blessings are proposed—*whosoever will.* Rev. xxii. 17. Consider how fully it meets all our wants, removes our guilt, helps us in our weakness, and provides for our natural ignorance divine wisdom, and for our many sorrows those joys which are heavenly and never pass away. If we connect all this with our desert of eternal wrath, surely we must see the supreme magnitude of this salvation.

And TO WHAT A HEIGHT OF GLORY DOES IT ULTIMATELY ADVANCE US! If even here in this world, surrounded with sin and sorrow, with darkness and misery, we can through the mercy of God discover some rays of the glory and greatness of this salvation, what will it be when we come to its full enjoyment in the realms above! It is called *an exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* O Christian reader! when we hear Christ sentence the wicked to eternal wrath, when we see them sink into everlasting

ruin; when we view the righteous about to enter the mansions of bliss; when, if his wondrous mercy has saved us, we ourselves join that blessed company, rise to that inconceivable glory, and bask in the bliss of that Divine Being in whose presence is fulness of joy; then we shall better understand the unspeakable greatness of this salvation. It brings in its final result perfect felicity, of endless duration and unchangeable security. So inexpressibly great is it, that all comparisons fail, and there is nothing that can fully illustrate its infinite excellence. Thus the Scriptures describe it—*God* so *loved the world*—so *great a salvation—Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.* Such expressions intimate that the greatness of this salvation is incomparable, and cannot be fully described or adequately conceived.

We might naturally think that such a salvation as this had only to be proposed, in order to be joyfully, gratefully, and universally received; but, alas! we need only look into the world, or even into our own hearts, to see the necessity of that question, *Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?*

It may be necessary here, first, to establish the fact of this neglect; and then to shew the danger of it.

We fear, then, it is too true, that a great proportion of those who hear the truth, do practically neglect it. We enter not into the case of the openly wicked, of those who are living in adultery, fornication, wrath, malice, contention, and altogether following the things of the world. It will be obvious enough that they not only neglect the salvation of the Gospel, but even the plain and common obligations of a decent morality. Nor need we consider the case of those who oppose and persecute the followers of the Gospel, either publicly or privately, and who when any of their friends and relatives become really in earnest about religion, do all they can to quench the flame of zeal and love, and to hinder their progress. They who thus act against the Gospel, manifestly enough do much worse

than neglect it. We would more particularly look at the case of those who have hitherto made light of salvation, and felt little or no concern about it. They see not the evil of sin, and have little confidence in God's word ; they discern not their want of salvation, and hence they do not earnestly and perseveringly desire it ; at least they do not diligently seek it in the use of the means which God has appointed ; such as hearing, reading, and meditating on the word of God ; prayer, watchfulness, self-denial, and taking up the daily cross. If they attend external means, it is from various inferior motives. They do not personally, heartily, and gladly receive the Gospel in its various parts. They do not come to Christ, seek his salvation, and rely on him as the only sure foundation of hope, and the complete Deliverer of all who trust in him. Their earnestness is about worldly, and not about spiritual things.

But let us pass from individual instances of neglect, to notice one peculiar national sin of our own highly-favoured land—neglect of the word of God. Dr. Chalmers speaks of millions within the limits of Christendom, nay, within the sight of Christian temples, and the sound of Sabbath bells, yet who never heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He says, "They live to manhood and to old age, deplorably ignorant of the way of salvation, and in ignorance, too, not the less deplorable than it is wilful. It is this which so fearfully aggravates their guilt, that on the very confines of light, they remain in darkness ; and therefore prove that it is a darkness which they love, and which they persist in. Thus it will be found more tolerable for the heathen world abroad, than the heathen world at home." *

O how true it is of Britain—*Neither have we obeyed the voice of the Lord our God, to walk in his laws which* HE *set before us by his servants the prophets.* Consider how God

* Mr. Foster, in his Essays on Popular Ignorance. speaks strongly on the same snhject, (p. 147.) He says, "It is very striking to consider that several millions, we may safely assert, of our English people, come to what should be years of discretion, are almost completely exempt from any manner of conscience, respecting this seventh part of time, not merely as to any required consecration of it to religion, but as to its being under any claim, or of any worth at all otherwise than for amnsement."

has favoured our country; how his word is read by authority in ten thousand parishes; and what multitudes of faithful ministers labour among us; and then reflect, that perhaps two thirds of our population seldom or never hear or read his word, and a vastly larger proportion practically disregard it, and then say whether this be not a serious national sin. Bishop Hurd observes, "In one respect our guilt exceeds that of the Pharisees or the Philosophers who rejected the Gospel; they were alike ignorant and unbelieving: we profess to know and to believe. Let us then take heed what we hear; lest our knowledge and belief add terrors to that day when the neglected word shall sit in judgment upon us." It was the special sin of Israel, and it is a special sin of Britain; that the Lord their God had condescended repeatedly, plainly, and most graciously to speak to them, but yet they disobeyed him. True it is, neither Israel nor Britain do sensibly and personally see or hear him; and Daniel (ix. 10.) meets that very common refuge of many who imagine they do not disobey God when they disregard and disobey the voice of his servants. Men think if God himself were to speak to them they would surely attend. But it is here shown, that in rejecting the messengers of God, they do in effect reject God himself. God accounts that HE is despised when his servants are disregarded, though he neither himself descends from heaven, nor sends his angels to announce his will.

This is the point which David fixes on in his confession, *Against thee, thee only, have I sinned.* The chief malignity of this sin is, that it is a most daring rebellion against God, a base contempt of the great and glorious Governor of the world; a most ungrateful return for immense obligations; and an apostacy in heart from him. May the Holy Spirit convince Britons of this their exceeding sinfulness, and lead them earnestly to seek that salvation in which is their only security.

How many national evils follow the neglect of the word has already been shewn, (Chap. ii.) Bishop Wenthall justly remarks, "These four grand evils, a greater decay

of the outward face and awe of religion, a falling off of the people on the one hand to popish superstitions, on the other to seditions, novelties, giddiness, confusion, and every evil work; and lastly of a multitude to downright atheism, would certainly and suddenly ensue, should frequent preaching fail."

The neglect of the Gospel proceeds from various causes. Natural corruption and pride are very strong in us, and the Gospel is a holy, humbling system, laying man in the dust; giving all glory to God, and yet calling for much self-denial and sacrifice. Pride, therefore, and the love of the world, and the indulgence of sinful and carnal desires, keep men from cordially receiving the Gospel. They gladly invent, or rely on other, and easier expedients, that will not so much interfere with their habits of self-indulgence. Sloth and procrastination hinder others: not seeing the infinite magnitude of eternal things, nor realizing the uncertainty of life, and the irreversible issue following death, they trifle and are careless on that one point where all our energy ought to be excited. Fear of man keeps many a one back from decision of character. The business of this life, magnified beyond its just value, because we have inadequate views of the Gospel, fully occupies others. By these and various other means, Satan detains men enchained in his power, and afar off from the blessings of salvation; and nothing but the omnipotent arm of Jehovah can deliver the captive soul.

What then is the state of him who neglects the Gospel? He is despising God's tenderest mercy; he is lying under his awful condemnation. It is not merely man that is displeased and offended, but God himself, with all his majesty and glory, his wisdom and power, his holiness and truth, his love and tenderness, his infinite excellence and glorious perfections.

The danger incurred by disregarding this salvation, is neither slight nor trifling. The Apostle asks, *How shall we escape if we neglect it?* His question is vehemently negative. It expresses the absolute impossibility of escaping

the divine wrath. A man may be so subtle and cunning as to escape reproach or blame from his fellow-creatures; he may be so ingenious as to cover his irreligion from every human eye; his conduct may be so outwardly fair, that he may stand well with every human being; but what will all this avail? he is not to be judged at last by man, but by the all-wise and almighty Jehovah. Who can escape his omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence? what time can take you out of the reach of Him who ever liveth? what place can hide you from him who is every where alike present? what subtilty can conceal aught from him who knows every inward thought of the heart.

If we only regard the aggravation of this sin, we may be sure that a peculiarly awful doom awaits a neglecter of salvation. Remember what has been said of this salvation, as the riches of divine wisdom, planned before time began, effected by the only-begotten Son of God, rescuing us from eternal perdition, and restoring us to heaven, and then say whether it be possible for a creature to cast greater contempt on God, than to prefer the perishing vanities of a fleeting world, and carelessly to disregard, and slight, and make light of the most wonderful display of divine wisdom and love manifested in the Gospel. O the blindness, hardness, and darkness of our carnal hearts! We profess to believe these things, and yet disregard nothing more. How tremendous will be that great day, when God shall enter into account with those who persevere in this neglect! they shall awaken to their true condition, and he shall say to them—*Behold! ye despisers, and wonder, and perish!* "Shall," says one, "the Son of God shed his blood in vain? Shall he suffer, and bleed, and die, for a thing of nought? Is it nothing unto you that he should undergo all these things? Can it be a matter of such small concern, that you will scarce make inquiry after it? Ah! be assured that these things are not so, and God grant that you may see this ere it be too late." You may be blinded, even while life is spared. It is an awful declaration that we sometimes see exemplified, respecting those who dislike

divine truth, and therefore neglect it, that *because they received not the love of the truth—God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie, that they all might be damned who believe not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.* Our first fall from holiness and happiness arose from not listening to the voice of God ; and all our subsequent falls, and the final and irreversible ruin of the wicked, arise from the same disregard of his word.

THE GUILT OF THOSE WHO NEGLECT SALVATION IS IMMENSE ! It was a great sin in the Jews to disobey the voice of God spoken by Moses. It was a still greater sin in a subsequent generation, after the example and punishment of their forefathers, to despise and misuse the prophets. It was a still further aggravation of iniquity, beyond all this, after all God's former dealings, and when the nation had been carried into captivity for refusing to hear the prophets, to reject the chief Prophet, our Lord Jesus Christ, and his Apostles. They filled *up the measure of their fathers . . . so that*, our Lord said to them, *upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth.* They sinned, after all the warnings of so many generations : *If I had not come,* says our Lord again, *they had not had sin,* (not to that extent ;) *but now they have no cloke for their sin.* O Christian reader ! how tremendously accumulated is the guilt of those in these last days, who, after the experience of so many ages, and with such a cloud of witnesses, still neglect so great salvation !

THEIR RUIN SHALL BE SUDDEN AND IRRETRIEVABLE! *How shall they escape ?* the expression intimates that the day of wrath will be to the wicked both unexpected and inevitable. They would gladly fly away, but flight from the Divine Presence is vain and impossible. They would gladly hide themselves in the lowest depths, and be covered by hills and mountains, but still God is there. That omnipresence which is the highest joy of his servants, is the sum of all terror to his enemies. Do they attempt to justify themselves? O how vain! Every disregarded minister, every broken sabbath, every neglected Bible is a

witness against them. The very dust shaken off the feet of the despised minister is a testimony against them. Mark vi. 11. God has declared that *it shall come to pass that every soul which will not hear* his Son *shall be destroyed from among the people.* Acts iii. 23. God has made known his final purpose—*They refused to hear my words; therefore, behold, I will bring evil upon them, which they shall not be able to escape.* Jer. xi. 10, 11.

THEY LIE UNDER THE CURSE OF THE LAW; how shall they escape its penalty? They are not like *the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it,* and *bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed,* and *receiveth blessing from God; but,* are like *that which beareth thorns and briars,* and *is rejected,* and *is nigh unto cursing, whose end is to be burned.* Heb. vi. 7, 8. Where God bestows great advantages, he expects corresponding fruitfulness; (Isa. v. 1—7.) and if there be no fruit, a double curse rests there. The law denounces wrath and perdition against the transgressor. They have transgressed times without number. In what refuge can they trust? Will ungodly companions help them? no: they equally need help. Will Satan's power shield them? they preferred his service; will he protect them? no: he is in himself punished; he shares the curse, and, as far as joy can enter his malignant heart, he rejoices in their ruin. Can the holy angels, or any of the saints assist? no: they can do, they choose to do, nothing but what God approves. Do they now look to Christ! O grievous ruin! it is too late! Their once-neglected Saviour is now their righteous Judge. They despised his salvation; and loved sinful pleasures better than Him who died for them. The neglected Gospel furnishes another aggravation of their ruin.

THEY WILL BE CONDEMNED AT THE FINAL JUDGMENT. In the day of trial, *God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing.* How shall they escape! What plea can they urge, when the pure and holy law of God, in all its reasonableness, and their daily violations of that law, are set before them? To the righteous, the day of

judgment is a day of great joy. 1 Thess. iv. 13—18. Those that are justified by faith in Christ, and love him and his people, shall not hear of one sin; (Jer. l. 20; Micah vii. 19; Heb. viii. 12.) but they shall hear of all the good which they did, and had forgotten. Matt. xxv. But God will enter into judgment with the wicked. They are under that awful saying of Christ, *Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for that city.* Matt. x. 14, 15. O how vain must be every plea when they have disregarded the wisdom of God, set before them in redemption by Jesus Christ; when they have slighted the only and God's own way of salvation! How shall they stand in his sight! they are speechless before him; and they hear the tremendous words, *Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels!*

They SHALL ENDURE ETERNAL WRATH! It is an awful question put by our Lord, *How can ye escape the damnation of hell?* Who can reverse the terrible sentence? When once it is passed, it is irreversible. It is justly merited. They were told of their danger. They heard that it was so great a danger, that the Son of God himself came down from heaven to avert it, and yet they carelessly slept, or rashly squandered away the precious hours of life in which they might have obtained it, and procrastinated, day after day, month after month, and year after year, when they should have fled from the wrath to come. They slighted years of probation, and every warning which God gave, and now Satan with malignant triumph, takes them as his perpetual prey, his lawful captives,—and they enter, never to leave, that dread abode where *the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched!*

These are not mere fancied dangers to awaken and excite feelings for the present moment. They are, to the neglecters of salvation, awful and swiftly-approaching realities. *God is not a man that he should lie, neither the son of*

man that he should repent; hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall it not come to pass? O careless hearers, pity yourselves! Consider your latter end. Search the Scriptures for yourselves; follow the directions there given by your all-merciful, and wise, and holy Creator and Judge; and now seek to obtain part and lot in the deliverance which has been wrought out by the Lord Jesus Christ.

For this salvation is so complete, that even those who have hitherto neglected it, and are now conscious of their neglect, may seek, and even surely expect, the pardon of such aggravated guilt; a guilt which every awakened mind will confess to be most dreadful and atrocious. Yes, reader! whoever you be, or whatever you may have been, now hasten to the Saviour; you will be welcome; he now waits willingly and gladly to receive you, however covered over with guilt, and to accept you just as you are. He will justify you freely, and replenish you with all his rich and full mercies and blessings! Thanks be unto God that this salvation is so great and perfect, that nothing, except our neglect of it, in one way or other, can exclude us from its eternal advantages. The trembling sinner, who is ready to think himself too criminal to be pardoned, or too polluted to be cleansed, may yet come to Christ. God sets his threatenings before us, not to destroy us, but in tender mercy, that ere the evil day arrive, we may have repented, and so escape; you may see this in the case of Nineveh, and in various other instances. The gracious Saviour now is ready to receive the worst sinners. The chief of sinners may come to him with entire confidence, and may expect from him the free gift of pardon, salvation, and all that he requires.

But let none presume hence to delay, and fancy that this very grace furnishes an excuse for negligence. Even a partial neglect of it will not escape sorrow and rebuke in this life, and those whose souls are not finally ruined, often obscure their hope and bring darkness on their mind, by giving way to carelessness about their eternal

interests. O let none trifle with things of such immense moment as their spiritual and eternal welfare ! For, consider, further,

The danger of neglecting this salvation may be more specially deduced from the solemn truth that the PRESENT MOMENT IS THE ONLY OPPORTUNITY FOR EMBRACING IT, that we can call our own, and the grace of God being wholly beyond our controul, if we now neglect this grace, it may never again be afforded us.* The scriptures frequently dwell on there being but a limited period for hearing the word. David says, (Ps. xcv. 7.) *To-day, if ye will hear his voice.* The Apostle (Heb. iii. 12—15.) lays much stress on this expression, *Take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God : but exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin ; for we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end : while it is said, To-day if ye will hear his voice.* And he afterwards again presses this (chap. iv. ver. 7.) *Again he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To-day, after so long a time.* He tells the Corinthians also, *We beseech you, also, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. . . . Behold, now is the accepted time ! Behold ! now is the day of salvation !* And so Isaiah says, *Seek ye the Lord while he may be found ; call ye upon him while he is near.* Now if prophets and apostles thus earnestly urge us to use the present time, and our Saviour himself pathetically and deeply sighs over Jerusalem, *If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace ;* surely it must be a thing

* Mr. Gisborne makes the following awakening observation on the importance of attention to each sermon that we hear.—"To how many sinners has an individual sermon been made as it were the hinge of conversion, the turning point between life and death ! Did you withhold your attention from the last sermon at which you were present? how know you but in that sermon was contained an elucidation of some important doctrine which you misconceive ; a scriptural example of virtue most needful to your edification ; a scriptural denunciation of vengeance against your own besetting sin ? How know you but that to the absence of the Christian armour which that discourse would have supplied, your fall under recent temptations is to be attributed? How know you but from the absence of that armour, temptations, even now impending over your head, will derive their particular strength."

of infinite danger to neglect so great salvation for a single day, or a single hour.

O the danger of delay and procrastination! It is the grand device of Satan to keep our souls from a present attention to our salvation. Most men think of being religious at some time or other. Undoubtedly the great multitude of those now in eternal woe once purposed to repent of their sins and turn to God; but they stifled their convictions, deferred the work to another time, and so were lost.

To-day is the whole of time that you can call your own. Attend while you are called; enter in while the door is open, lest it be for ever closed. It is possible that the day of mercy may be ended as to you, even before the day of death comes. God sometimes gives up those who have refused to hear, to a hardened heart, even while life continues. Thus Pharaoh was hardened before his death. *To-day*, then,—forthwith—immediately—while the word is sounding in your ears—while the invitation comes to you—now —*now is the accepted time.* How know you but that this may be the special, the appointed, the only season of grace for you. *Now, as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.*

O reader, think of that word TO-DAY. Well may we be in earnest with you: Satan, and the flesh, and the world, plead hard against Christ, and against you. They all say TO-MORROW. No! to-morrow will not do; for God says, TO-DAY. Begin this very day to hear, believe, and obey his voice. There will always be difficulties, Those difficulties will increase, and not diminish. You never can, you never will, in your whole life, have a more suitable season for breaking through all obstacles, and giving yourself up to God, than the present moment. *Behold*, says Christ, *I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me.* Fear then to lose the divine mercy, and weary the divine patience, by inexcusable presumption. Fear to provoke the divine wrath and displeasure. To defer reconciliation to God to any future period, is the

most reprehensible and ruinous folly. It supposes that God will indulge us with the allowance of sensual and sinful appetites, and cause his mercy to wait till we have executed our iniquitous purposes. It shews that we do in our hearts prefer Satan to Christ, sin to holiness, and earth to heaven. And can we seriously think that God will be thus mocked ? No ; we deceive ourselves ; we fill up thus the measure of sin to our ruin.

To-day, then, God calls you ; to-day he sets before you the riches of his grace, a free reconciliation, full pardon, the gift of his Spirit, and the sure hope of everlasting life. Before you refuse, before you delay, before you trifle with and neglect so great a salvation, think what may be on the morrow. If you reject his offer, to-morrow may be too late. God may be silent—his grace may no longer be set before you,—his gospel no more sound in your ears ; you may be given up to a hardened heart ; you may be doomed to eternal perdition. Thus you may be left under the final curse of bitter and unavailing self-reproach, and for ever remain in that outer darkness where is weeping and gnashing of teeth. O what an awful description is that given by our Lord of those who in his day neglected this salvation—*This people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed ; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them !* May the writer and the reader of these pages ever receive from above that power of the Holy Spirit, which may enlighten the eyes of our understanding, and preserve us from a doom so earnestly to be deprecated, so deeply to be deplored ! For, after all, what can mere reasoning avail ? O blessed Spirit ! thou alone canst convert and edify. It has been most justly observed,* and the author feels that the fault has too often attached to himself, " Some press to duties, so that they seem to think, that their reasonings are able to enforce a

* See Halyburton's Life.

compliance; or at least they do not take care to keep up in themselves and their hearers, a constant sense of the contrary, in order earnestly to engage in dependance on the Spirit of the Lord."

O Holy Ghost! into our mind,
  Send down thy heavenly light;
Kindle our hearts with fervent zeal,
  To serve God day and night.

Ordination Service.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BLESSED RESULTS OF FAITHFUL HEARING.

THE former chapter closed with an affecting description given by our Lord of the awful state of those who neglected the Gospel : we turn now to a brighter scene. Our Lord, after speaking those awakening words, directly contrasts the state of the wicked with the happiness of his own disciples, receiving his word : *But blessed are your eyes, for they see ; and your ears, for they hear : for verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them ; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.* They were blessed above those around them who disregarded the words of Christ ; and above even kings and prophets of former ages, who, though they knew Christ, and trusted in him as a Saviour to come, had yet comparatively very indistinct apprehensions of him, and would have rejoiced to have witnessed what the Apostles did. The particulars of this blessing are worthy of distinct and full consideration. In what respects is the faithful hearer blessed ?

HIS FACULTIES ARE THEN EMPLOYED FOR THE END FOR WHICH THEY WERE GIVEN. Our various senses and abilities, our sight, our hearing, our memory, understanding, and affections, were bestowed upon us for the glory of God, and our own present and eternal good. They are then engaged for these ends, and used to the best account, when they are exercised upon discovering and receiving the

sacred truths of the Gospel. The Gospel alone sets before us that which can fill and satisfy our immortal souls; and when our faculties are employed on other things, without reference to, or concern about, the will of God, all our powers are wasted and squandered away; we *spend money for that which is not bread, and labour for that which satisfieth not.* They are not merely unprofitably expended, but lost in a way that will bring upon us future condemnation and final ruin. But let our faculties be rightly directed to know and do the will of God, and we are so living as he would have us live; so as will glorify his name, secure his favour, and our own best happiness.

His MANY ADVANTAGES ARE IMPROVED to the purpose for which they have been bestowed. Peculiar and distinguished are the privileges which we enjoy in this day, and in this land. We live in a day of much light, and, blessed be God, of increasing religion and piety. We live in a protestant country, and have the Bible richly diffused among us. We do not enough thank God for being born in such an age, and such a country, and that we are spared a combat with many prejudices of birth, custom, and example, which our forefathers sustained, and others still sustain. It is true, that some have to struggle through great difficulties, before they are brought to see the truth as it is in Jesus: if grace has enabled us to do so, we have only the more cause for gratitude. But there are multitudes who neglect all these advantages, and who will therefore have a worse doom hereafter than Sodom or Gomorrah. To have been led by divine grace to seize the golden opportunity for eternal life, is a blessing for which we shall thank God through eternity. It was not any wisdom in the Christian, more than in others; it was God's mercy, and the teaching of his Spirit, that made all the difference. This wonderfully enhances the blessing, and for this our song shall swell the heavenly chorus hereafter, with endless joy and gratitude.

His KNOWLEDGE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TRUTHS IS ENLARGED. It is not merely the reading of good books,

or hearing of good sermons, from worldly motives, and in a worldly spirit, that increases divine knowledge. The teaching of God's Spirit is necessary for this end; and that teaching is freely bestowed in a due regard to the preaching of the word. How blessed is it to be thus divinely instructed! All saving knowledge comes from hence; if you neglect the means which God has appointed, he may leave your soul to perish for lack of knowledge, in the midst of the most abundant means. But experience shews that by a humble, faithful, and regular attendance on the ministry of the word, with a spirit of prayer for God's blessing, knowledge of divine things is given to you from above. Thus every sermon may be the means of your increasing in heavenly wisdom. It is in this view that Solomon says, *Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors; for whoso findeth me, findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord.* A little knowledge, where it is from above, where it is gracious and saving, has a blessedness above all calculation. At the time that our Lord pronounced the Apostles blessed, (Matt. xiii. 16.) they knew very little, but they were under his teaching; he explained his doctrine to them more fully; and, by degrees, they came to *the riches of the full assurance of understanding.* Let us then earnestly apply ourselves to this source of instruction. How forcible, in this view, is that address, (Prov. ii. 1—6.) *My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee, . . . so that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding: yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest for her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God, for God giveth wisdom.*

Hereby WE KNOW THAT GOD HAS CALLED US OUT OF THE WORLD, TO PARTAKE OF THE BLESSINGS OF THE GOSPEL. St. Paul says, *Whom he did predestinate, them he also called.* Rom. viii. 30. This is an inestimable privi-

lege. By the preaching of the Gospel we are called out from a world lying in wickedness, from the service of sin and Satan, to follow the Saviour and obtain his glory. 2 Thess. ii. 14. In this *heavenly calling*, (Heb. iii. 1.) we are invited by the Father of all mercies freely to partake of all spiritual blessings. Are we doubtful whether we are included? how can we doubt, when the last lingering words of his own book again repeat the oft-reiterated (Isa. lv. 1; John vii. 37.) invitation, *Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.* Rev. xxii. 17. Do you feel so pressed and weighed down with sin, that you think you cannot be included? you are the very persons especially invited—*Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* Matt. xi. 28. Do you yet hesitate? ministers are sent on purpose to entreat you—*We are ambassadors for Christ; as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you, in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled.* 2 Cor. v. 20. Are you still full of fears that you MAY not believe? nay, rather fear, lest you should not obey his commands; for *this is his commandment, that ye should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ.* 1 John iii. 23. Rather fear, lest you incur his final wrath by unbelief—*He that believeth not the Son, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.* John iii. 36. And as God thus calls all that hear the Gospel by the outward preaching, so he inwardly, by the teaching and internal calling of his blessed Spirit, given with the outward word, disposes his people to attend to his word, and to become partakers of his blessing, and to have fellowship with his Son. 1 Cor. i. 9; 1 Thess. i. 5.

CONVICTION OF SIN FOLLOWS A RIGHT HEARING OF THE WORD. We shall thus be led to acknowledge the perfection of the law of God, and the wretchedness and insolvency of man, and be truly humbled and contrite before God. This is the special work of the Holy Spirit through hearing. Acts ii. 37. It is founded on a knowledge of God's holy law, requiring constant and undeviating obedience in thought as well as in word and deed, and of our own innumerable violations of that law, and utter

inability to fulfil it ; on a view of the unspeakable loving-kindness of the Lord, and our own vile, ungrateful, hard and evil hearts. Then our guilt is not extenuated, but confessed ; and our natural corruption is not brought forward as an excuse, but as an aggravation of our many offences. This conviction arises from a cordial reception of the truth. This important effect of the instruction of ministers is independent of their endeavours. There is this unavoidable defect in the teaching of ministers, that they cannot answer as to the result in particular cases. But the Spirit of God, through them, does much more. He not only presents in the word the truths which he designs to teach, but he also opens the heart to receive them —*The Lord opened Lydia's heart that she attended to the things which were spoken of Paul.* As soon might the blind reason themselves into sight ; or the deaf into hearing, as we, by any powers of our own, remove the blindness and hardness of our hearts, and become truly contrite and penitent. As the mighty works of Christ were performed by his miraculous and visible interference, so it is no less necessary for the Holy Spirit by his real, though invisible interference, to awaken and renew the dead souls of men, and convince them of sin. But though repentance and conviction of sin are thus the work of the Spirit, yet the preacher is the chief means which the Spirit uses ; and of the word He declares, *It shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.* Conviction of sin is one great design of God in sending his ministers. Thus Nineveh was led to repent.* Thus Baruch was

* Alluding to the repentance of the people of Nineveh, Latimer says, "Jonah was hut one man, and he preached hut one sermon, and it was hnt a short sermon neither, as touching the number of words ; and yet he turned all the whole city, great and small, rich and poor, king and all. We be many preachers here in England, and we preach many long sermons, and yet the people will not repent nor convert. This was the fruit, the effect, and the good, that his sermon did, that all the whole city, at his preaching, converted and amended their evil living, and did penance in sackcloth. And yet here in this sermon of Jonah is no great curiousness, no great clerkliness, no great affection of words nor of painted eloquence ; it was none other hut *Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed !* It was no more. This was no great curious sermon ; hut this was a nipping sermon, a pinchiug sermon, a hiting sermon, it had a full hite, it was a rough sermon, and a sharp-biting sermon.

directed to go and proclaim the words of the Lord under this hope—*It may be, they will present their supplication before the Lord, and will return every one from his evil way.* Jer. xxxvi. 7.

Another blessed result of hearing aright is, that IT IS GOD'S METHOD OF IMPARTING FAITH TO HIS PEOPLE. Faith is undoubtedly God's gift. (John vi. 44 ; Matt. xvi. 17 ; Phil. i. 29 ;) but the way in which it pleases him that it should BEGIN, is by hearing the truth. Rom. x. 17. We look in vain for faith among those who know not divine truth, and never hear the word of God. But Paul describes the faith of Christians as following hearing the word of truth. Eph. i. 13. Faith springs from the word, as the living plant from the root, and as the rays from the sun. It is impossible for any one to become a believer in Christ, but through some part of revealed truth made known to him.* The PROGRESS of faith proceeds in the same way from hearing. At first, we are *weak in faith*, like little children, but the word is as *milk* to the young, (1 Cor. iii. 1, 2.) and as *meat* to the strong men, (Heb. v. 14.) by which both are nourished and strengthened. And the PERFECTING of faith is connected also with the ministry of the word. St. Paul shews at some length that ministers are appointed for this end, even *the perfecting of the saints.* Eph. iv. 11—13. Right hearing of the word nourishes till it perfects faith. It will be found true, in general experience, that in proportion as the whole truths of God are clearly brought before the minds of men by the

Do you not here marvel that these Ninevites cast not Jonah in prison, that they did not revile him, and rebuke him? They did not revile him, nor rebuke him; but God gave them grace to hear him, and to convert, and amend at this preaching. A strange matter, so noble a city to give place to one man's sermon!"—Sermon on Luke xii. 15.

* Latimer thus meets the objection made from his admitting that some of our forefathers might be saved without hearing—"But some will say, What need we preachers then? God can save his elect without preachers. A goodly reason! God can save my life without meat and drink, need I none therefore? God can save me from burning if I were in the fire, shall I run into it therefore? No, no; I must keep the way that God hath ordained, and use the ordinary means that God hath assigned, and not seek new ways. This office of preaching is the only ordinary way that God hath appointed to save us all by."—Sermon on Matt. xxii. 21.

public ministry of the word, and as they faithfully and constantly attend it, so true Christian faith, with all its blessed effects, will spread and increase.* The reason is, it is promised that a divine power shall accompany the word—*My word that goeth forth out of my mouth, shall not return unto me void.* The word of man, or of angels, has no such power. Certainly, though men by persuasion can produce many important changes of sentiment, no voice or word of men can by its native energy impart divine faith, and regenerate and convert the soul. John i. 12, 13; James i. 18. True Christian faith will not spring, or grow under mere human doctrine. *Thus saith the Lord*, is the only foundation for that faith which overcomes the world, and gives peace to the troubled conscience. St. Paul restricts the gift of faith in ordinary cases to the hearing of the word, as is evident from the whole passage. Rom. x. 8—17. All systems of ethics, all mere human philosophy, all the wisdom of this world, are utterly insufficient. In Jeremiah (xxiii. 28, 29.) it is asked, with amazing emphasis and force of contrast, *What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord. Is not my word like as a fire, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?* The Holy Scriptures were written for the very purpose of producing faith in those who received them. *These things*, says St. John, *are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.* John xx. 31.

* The Reformers insisted much on this. Cranmer, in his Catechism published in 1548, gives this exhortation—"Forasmuch as faith is the work of God and the light of our hearts, which God putteth in us by his word and Holy Spirit, (so that we cannot attain faith and the knowledge of Christ without God's word and true preachers,) therefore accustom yourselves even from your tender age to hear the word of God, that he by his Holy Spirit may move and may stir up your hearts to true faith and knowledge of him." Tindal also, in his Exposition of 1 John i. 3, 4, says, "To bring unto the fellowship of God and Christ, and of them that believe in Christ, is the final intent of all the Scripture, why it was given of God unto man, and the only thing which all true preachers seek, and whereby ye shall ever know and discern the true word of God from all false and counterfeited doctrine of vain traditions, and the true preacher from the wily hypocrite. We preach unto you, says John, that everlasting life which we have heard, and in hearing received through faith, and are sure of it, to draw you to us out of that fellowship which we have with the Devils in sinful lusts and ignorance of God."

Hereby OUR JUSTIFICATION IS CONFIRMED. It is true that we are *justified freely by the grace* of God, *through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.* Rom. iii. 24. But how do I receive the blessing? By faith. What is the warrant of that faith? The word of God. How are we to obtain that faith? By hearing. How is that faith proved to be genuine? By its conforming the soul to the word, and producing corresponding fruits in the life. *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.* John x. 27. When we hear Christ's voice and follow him, then we may be sure that he knows us, and we are his sheep, and among his justified people. *Whom he called, them he also justified.* Rom. viii. 50.

Hereby OUR ADOPTION IS CERTIFIED. God gives to his people the spirit of adoption; *the power* (εξουσιαν,) the right or privilege, *to become the sons of God.* John i. 12. This is given to those *that believe on the name of his Son.* When Christ is preached, and I hear, and, through the Holy Spirit, accept the offer of mercy in Christ, I become a child of God, and am reckoned in that family of which it is said, *As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.* Rom. viii. 14—17. By nature men are the servants of sin, and under its tyrannical bondage; but the receiving of the truth breaks the chains and admits them to *the glorious liberty of the children of God.* Rom. viii. 21. Our Lord says, *Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.* John viii. 32. Who can tell the blessedness of looking up to God with filial confidence and love as our Father? Surely, no tongue can express the delightful bliss of seeing the love of a Heavenly Parent in our own paternal feelings, and discovering in our care and tenderness towards our children, day by day, fresh traces and emblems of his parental care, and love, and tenderness towards us

his children, elevating the heart to him, and filling it with joy and gladness. O what fulness of joy is it to have such a Father, so wise and so mighty, so rich and so bountiful, so kind and so tender, so holy and so unspeakably excellent, our reconciled Father in Jesus Christ !

Hereby OUR ELECTION IS SECURED. We are charged, *Give diligence to make your calling and election sure.* 2 Pet. i. 10. By diligently attending the means of grace, we obtain divine strength enabling us to be holy and to glorify God, and thus have a sweet assurance given that we are *chosen in Christ.* Eph. i. 4. And what love is here! that God should, from his own good pleasure, before time began, have planned salvation, and purposed, to the glory of his own grace and the praise of his name, to save us from sin, make us holy, and bring us to his kingdom : I say, this is such a display of divine mercy and love, as, if once reasonably made out from the word of God and the work of his Spirit on the heart, cannot but fill us with love, and gratitude, and assured hope, and the most joyful anticipations of future glory, and deeply humble our souls in the conviction that all we are and have is of sovereign grace and love. Latimer says, " Whosoever heareth the word of God and followeth it, the same is elect by him. And again, whosoever refuseth to hear the word of God and follow the same, is damned. So that our election is sure if we follow the word of God."*

Hereby GOD CARRIES ON OUR SANCTIFICATION. All Christian graces are nourished and strengthened by a due regard to Christ's word. We have seen, that regeneration and faith are thus given, and all holiness is thus advanced in us. Our Lord prays to his Father for his disciples—*Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth.* John xvii. 17. They who are most eminent for holiness, are among those who are at the same time the most constant and diligent in attending the ministry of the Gospel. Christian reader ! we appeal to you, how often has your heart, when dull and lifeless, hereby been stirred up and quick-

* See Latimer's Sermons, vol. ii, p. 425.

ened! How often have holy resolutions been thus first xcited in your mind! How certainly all your religion would, humanly speaking, have died, had it not been for the afresh-quickening and new-reviving power of the Gospel. It is called, and it is found to be, *a savour of life unto life.* Every sinful disposition and affection is checked and curbed, every holy and heavenly desire and feeling is nourished and strengthened, while we are humbly waiting for divine instruction in the way of God's appointment. *The manifestation of the Spirit* (whether it be *the word of wisdom,* or *the word of knowledge* or any other gift) *is given to every* man *to profit withal.* (1 Cor. xii. 7, 8.) both for himself and for others. Every part of the word is designed for our good; let none, then, of the precious seed be lost.

THE SPIRITUAL COMFORT OF THE BELIEVER IS MAINTAINED AND ADVANCED. The Gospel is the dispensation of the Holy Ghost, the Comforter. It is *good tidings of great joy.* The office of ministers is to comfort the people of Christ, as well as to awaken the careless. And O what full and abounding comfort there is to the tried, afflicted, and burdened Christian, in the rich promises of a free pardon, a full and gratuitous justification by Christ, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the new covenant *well ordered in all things and sure!* Christian reader! have you never gone to the house of God weary, disquieted, and sorrowful, and there heard a word in season, and returned calm and peaceful, and happy? Have you never there experienced some of the cheering consolations which flow from the divine love *shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit,* and the blessedness and excellence of that *peace of God which passeth all understanding?* This has been the happy experience of the servants of God. David says, *Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound; they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance.* To taste the love of Christ to us, and to feel emotions of strongest love to Him, this is heaven begun below. O how the hearts of the hearers of the Lord must have been comforted when he asked the ques-

tion, *Who is my father, and who are my brethren? and he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother, and my brethren! And he said unto them, My mother and brethren are these which hear the word of God and do it.* The very assurance that in duly regarding that word we are fulfilling a plain duty, and attending to our highest interest, may well comfort us; and the doctrines of the Gospel truly received are an unfailing spring of happiness.

Our SOULS ARE RIPENING FOR THE GLORY TO COME. Not merely temporal benefits, but a preparation for eternal, is connected with a due regard to Christ's word. Our Lord asserts, *He that heareth my words, and believeth in me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death to life.* This is the road in which the saints that now fill the heavenly mansions once walked on earth. They heard, and listened to, and loved the truth of God. They tasted its sweetness, they experienced its power, they lived under its influence. St. Peter says, *Desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby,* unto salvation.* 1 Pet. ii. 2. Would you attain the glory above? tread in the steps of the saints below, and thus be *followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.* Reader! it is true excellence, and the way to true glory, to discern the vanity of all knowledge separate from that which makes wise unto salvation, and to yield and submit ourselves wholly to the guidance of divine truth. Those saved by the Gospel are freely pardoned, justified, and accepted of God, sanctified by his Holy Spirit, and made meet to be partakers of the heavenly inheritance. They are adopted into the family of their Divine Parent, made heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. To be delivered from the wrath of God, the power of Satan, and the misery of hell; to be changed, renewed, and purified by the Holy Ghost; to be translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son; and even now to have the sure hope of everlasting life—these are some foretastes of future bless-

* The best manuscripts adds, εις σωτηριαν. See Griesbach and Vater.

ings, and the way in which God fits and trains up his children for the family above.

Wherever the Gospel is preached, there, to a larger or smaller extent, these blessings are imparted to those who faithfully hear it. But we have hitherto only discoursed of blessings given in this life: let us look forward a little. *Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.* Rev. xxii. 14.

What then are the happy results of faithful hearing, as they regard eternal life? Let us look at it only in one point—the PERFECT KNOWLEDGE OF GOD WHICH WE SHALL THEREBY ATTAIN. Now under the clearest discourses of the ministry, and the fullest privileges of the Gospel, *we see through a glass darkly, but then, face to face: now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known.* There is a veil of flesh between us and the world of spirits; there is a body of sin and death that intercepts our view, and obscures our prospect, and hinders our full knowledge. True it is, we have the cheering light of God's holy word; (an inestimable advantage) *a light to our feet, and a lamp to our paths,* to guide us safe in the way to heaven. Christians are like men travelling along a high road in the night, with a sufficient light in their hands to guide them through to their home; but they can see little or nothing of the beauties and glories of the country through which they pass; the most splendid landscape may be spread before them; the hills, and dales, and rivers, and woods may enrich the scene with diversified beauty; the most curious, and delicate plants and flowers may adorn the whole, and yet the pilgrim be either unconscions of it, or unable to discern it. But, bye and bye, the night will pass away, the morning of the resurrection will come, and then, O then! what tongue can tell the enraptured emotions of the faithful servant of Christ, discovering infinite beauties, where he was ready to think all was gloom and dreariness; magnificence and glory bursting on his ravished sight, beyond all his conceptions! What heart can imagine the

blessed resnlt, which will assuredly succeed to our now walking by faith, when the veil is removed, and the glorious light of life shines upon us, and we behold that heavenly country, of which it is said, *there shall be no night there, and they need no candle, neither light of the sun ; for the Lord giveth them light, and they shall reign for ever and ever !*

Invisible things are now discovered to us, not as they are in themselves, but by visible things. We see something of the excellence of God in the various titles by which he reveals himself. We hear of him as our Father and our Portion, our Shield, and our exceeding great Reward. We are told that Christ is our Prophet, our Priest, and our King; and that we are to view him as the Sun of Righteousness, the Light of the World, and the Bread of Life. The Blessed Spirit is represented to us as a Comforter and Sanctifier, as Purifying Fire, and Refreshing and Living Water. Through these figures, some faint but most important ideas of the ever-glorious Jehovah are conveyed to our understanding, spiritual things are thus discerned by us, through the emblem of natural things ; they are now only objects of faith, and are therefore seen afar off and obscurely. O how infinitely superior then will be that knowledge of which it is now said, *It doth not yet appear what we shall be : but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is*—we *shall know even as also* we are *known.*

Now God is training up his children in the school of this world, for their heavenly and enduring state. The man of the deepest wisdom, and of the most enlarged intellect, must say, (as Solomon did) while here, *I am but a little child*—I speak as a child—I understand as a child—I think as a child. But our manhood will THEN have come. We shall cease from human tuition. We shall rest in God. O how cheering is the thought that multitudes of names that now divide the church, and are made leaders of opposite parties, will, it may be well hoped, spend a blessed eternity together, every distinction lost in magnifying but one name

—*God, our Saviour.*. All those knotty and difficult questions which now distract the church, will then be fully and for ever answered. It will no more be difficult to reconcile the grace of God and the freedom of men ; the sincere invitations of his word, and the final destruction of the wicked ; his foreknowledge of their ruin, and that ruin wholly brought on them by their own fault. It will then be distinctly and clearly seen that God was, in all his dealings, infinitely and supremely full of wisdom, truth, and holiness ; altogether just, of unbounded mercy and unparalleled love : in short, *righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.*

Then shall we see *face to face.* Hence we shall have a clear, familiar, and intimate knowledge of God, making as great a difference as the knowledge which we have of a person only by report, and that which we have of him by personally seeing him and conversing with him from day to day. Only there will be this delightful difference. We cannot become intimately acquainted with the best of human beings, without discovering something of remaining corruption ; but the more we see and fully know our God, the more we shall discover unexpected and perfect excellence, without one defect or blemish. Now, *no man can see his face and live.* Exod. xxxiii. 10. *We see through a glass,* (δι εσοπτρου, *through a mirror,*) *darkly,* (εναινιγματι *in an enigma,*) with much obscurity. We know God by faith, we see him in emblems and figures. Hereafter the dim mirror will be no longer needed, for we shall see, and know, and enjoy God in a higher way than now we can imagine, for *we shall know even as we are known.* Not that the creature can know the Creator to the same extent as the Creator knows him ; but in the same mode of knowledge, and as intimately, sensibly, and perceptibly as now we know our fellow-creatures.

O cheering thought ! *this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.* John xvii. 3. Then his perfections and divine glory will all be clearly illustrated and fully displayed. It was

the prayer of Moses, *Shew me thy glory !* and, though he could not while in the flesh behold it, yet God made his goodness to pass before him ; and, hid in the cleft of the rock, he saw the back parts of Jehovah, even his glorious character in forgiving sin, and yet retaining perfect justice. Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. What Moses, on the mount and hid in the rock, could only partially see, we shall in heaven ever behold. The wonderful harmony and surpassing excellence of the divine perfections will then be fully revealed. There his providences will all be solved. He told Peter *What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.* John xiii. 7. Infinite goodness and truth will be seen in all those Dispensations that are now difficult and gloomy : why one lost a dear and only child, another the wife of his bosom when most needed for his family, another was disappointed of his most cherished hope, another was removed from a scene of great usefulness, a pious minister cut off, the candlestick removed from churches, and the wicked for a season triumphant. The tenderest mercy, and the most inviolable faithfulness, will be discerned in the heaviest trials and sorrows, even as the brightest rainbow may sometimes be seen on the darkest cloud. The wisdom of God in all his doings, will be fully established and justified, and universally acknowledged. Now the wicked cast many a reproach against their Maker, and he forbears to execute judgment, and his servants often cannot discern his ways. We cannot tell all the reasons for which evil is permitted and the wicked prosper ; though in his word we see enough to lead every believer to rest with fullest confidence in the goodness and righteousness of God. But then there will be an infinitely higher knowledge. The beautiful language of Isaiah will all be realized—*The Sun shall be no more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee ; but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down ; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself : for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.*

O happy day! O happy people that *know the joyful sound;* they shall *walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance!* O happy result of faithful hearing! Christian reader! let us seek this happiness, as the one great object of our worthy and incessant pursuit.

Are you desirous of this happiness, and yet utterly uncertain and doubtful about your interest in it? Have you examined yourself, and still are unable to discover what is your character? or, rather, fearful, that you are among the unfaithful hearers of the word? Well, suppose it to be so, as with vast multitudes it is so; what is your present duty, and your first interest? Fly on the wings of faith to the Saviour. Exercise present acts of faith in him. Regard his great, and full, and free salvation. Cast yourself, guilty and vile as you truly judge yourself to be, on his ample merits: and it may be that in the very exercise of faith you shall discover, not only that *he that believeth shall be saved,* but that you do really believe, and are among the saved. You may receive from that blessed Saviour, the large gift of the Holy Ghost, and so may be filled with love, and joy, and peace, and break through all the trammels of sin and Satan, and triumph over the world, and live here to the praise and glory of God, and the good of man, and finally join the spirits of just men made perfect above, to inherit with them the full enjoyment of their praises, and their participation of the divine glory through eternity.

CHAPTER XV.

ADDRESS TO DIFFERENT CLASSES, EXHORTING THEM TO ATTEND TO THIS DUTY.

THOUGH the danger of neglecting the word be so great, and the blessed result of attending to it so unspeakably important, yet, as we have already intimated, it is an appalling fact, that the great mass of professing Christians in a Christian land do neglect to hear, or hear very irregularly. We would close then this Treatise, by earnestly beseeching all such persons, of whatever condition, or in whatever class of life they may be, to lay to heart the duty which it is the design of this Treatise to recommend and enforce.

Are you IN EMINENT AND LEADING SITUATIONS—Rulers and Governors, Statesmen and Legislators, Barristers, and Physicians, whose employment is of such magnitude, and whose avocations are so numerous, and engagements so unremitting, that it appears to you that there is a reasonable excuse for your absence? of all other classes, the load of responsibility falls heaviest on you. You stand upon an elevation so commanding, your influence is so extensive, and your personal piety so indispensable, that, without it, all your means and power, instead of a comprehensive benefit, may become a wide-wasting mischief. You are equally dependant with the poorest and the meanest of your fellow-creatures, as to your everlasting salvation, on the use of the means which God has appointed. You are bound by the very knowledge which exalts you

above others, to be aware of this. You will be under an aggravated condemnation, if, professing yourselves to be wise, you act the part of the greatest folly, and misuse all the distinguished talents with which you are intrusted. Your situation gives you peculiar advantages for attaining and diffusing heavenly wisdom. How tremendous your responsibility if you use these advantages for increasing and extending that wisdom which is *earthly, sensual, and devilish!* Do you speak of the impossibility of sparing time? You only shew your earthly mind. It is impossible only because of the superior importance which you attach to earthly things.* The time taken from religion is not saved: the time given to it, is not lost. How many instances occur of men in high stations so overwhelming themselves with work, and so neglectful of hearing the word, and so misemploying the sabbath, and thence so destitute of the comfort of that word, that in an hour of depression, despondency prevails, and they destroy themselves! Such instances are beacons to all in every station, not to violate God's appointed ordinances, however occupied, even if the violation had only an injurious influence on the present life. The Christian will feel far higher motives: and such men as Sir Matthew Hale, and the late Mr. Hey of Leeds, shew how it is possible, even amid other multifarious and important engagements, to find time for hearing the word. In fact, there have been men faithfully discharging the duties of religion in all those precise situations of lawful employment which worldly men allege as a sufficient excuse for neglect.

Are you IN EXTENSIVE BUSINESS, in the midst of large

* Cecil's remarks, in his sermon on Jer. xxiii, 28, 29, on men's preferring their own notions and dreams to simple Evangelical truth, are striking—"It pleases God to appoint the preaching of the Gospel in a neighbourhood; that is, he opens a spring of life in a dry and barren place. But one man cannot attend, though he lives in the neighbourhood, and why? he leans to his imaginations: he has dreamed! he is a Socinian, and cannot hear the doctrines taught in the Church of England. Another is a philosopher truly! he has turned his thoughts to the reason and fitness of things, and cannot attend to the plain and simple preaching of God's word, which calls him to lay down all imaginations and reasonings, and be taught by his great parent, which is that religion which is acceptable to himself."

mercantile transactions, and extending your schemes and plans on every side, either at home or abroad ? O, without the divine blessing, what good will you derive from worldly prosperity ? You may perhaps come to roll in wealth ; but even now your wills are perpetually crossed, and care and anxiety rob you of repose ; disease will soon follow—death is at hand—and what will be the end, when your soul shall be required of you ? Do you ask, What shall I do ? moderate your earthly desires ; restrain your ambitious projects ; attend to something higher, and more really profitable—your spiritual, your eternal good ; make it your main concern *to fear God and keep his commandments ;* here is your first business and true bliss. Do you call this folly and enthusiasm ? Hearken, men of mere business ! you are enthusiasts ; you are extravagant : you are imprudent ; your schemes are trifling ; your speculations fanciful and delusive ! No, you reply ! we lay our plans wisely and cautiously ; we have long experience ; they are sure to succeed. Be it so. Let them succeed, still the charge is true : your great business is overlooked ; your chief interest is neglected ; your main chance is still in hazard : you are wise for a day, but are you not fools for endless days ? you gain a child's rattle ; you lose an angel's inheritance ; you escape an earthly bankruptcy ; you are plunging headlong to a bankruptcy which will ruin you for ever. Do I exceed ? no, the figures fall short, infinitely short, of the tremendous reality. Listen, O listen to the infallible word of God—*Heaven and earth shall pass away ; but* that word *shall not pass away.*

Are you PARENTS ? And will you neglect this word ? will you set your children a pattern of disobedience to the best of Parents, our heavenly Father ? How can you ask them to obey you, when you wilfully disobey Him ! You wish for the good of your children ; you desire to make them happy, and possibly, in order to promote this, you spend the sabbath in idle parties of pleasure and vain amusements. What are your feelings at the close of such a sabbath ? After a day so spent, are you not wearied,

disappointed, burdened, and dissatisfied? So far from being refreshed for the duties of another week, you are unfitted for them. There is infinitely more vexation in misspending the sabbath, than in any apparent mortification of our carnal pleasures by following its due and holy employment. Give the day to its sacred duties; bring your children to hear his ministers;* and especially let the word of Christ this day reign in your heart and family, and it will spread a heavenly influence around you; you will be invigorated and quickened for all your daily toil and labours. The word of God, wherever it is received and obeyed, spreads life and fertility, joy and happiness.

Are you CHILDREN! begin early to love and reverence the word of God. Be attentive to what is said by his ministers. Try at least to remember the text of the sermon which you hear. Ask your parents to explain what you do not understand. Think of young Samuel; while he was *a little child*, he *ministered unto* the Lord, when *the word of the Lord was precious.* He watched *in the temple of the Lord*, and God called him to be a prophet, and used him as an instrument of extensive good. My little children, love to hear like Samuel, who said, when God called him, *Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.* Young as you are, you should consider yourself a servant of God, you should hear what he speaks, and hear in order to obey. Think of the children who sang Hosannas in the Temple; and of Jesus himself, who at twelve years of age was found in the midst of the Doctors, both hearing and asking them questions. Pray you for God's blessing, as that child did of whom it is said that she never entered the house of God without secretly offering up this petition, "Lord, help me to remember something." The way in which the young become strong, and overcome the wicked one, is by having the word of God abide in them. 1 John ii. 14.

* In a sermon on Luke ii. 42, as to Joseph and Mary's taking Jesus at twelve years old to the temple, Latimer commends Mary for going, as the law did not oblige her, and thinks she went to hear the word of God. He adds, "Note the painfulness of Mary, that she was content to go so great a journey for God's sake. I fear this journey of her's will condemn a great many of us, who will not go out of doors to hear God's word."

Are you IN INFERIOR SITUATIONS?—Clerks, apprentices, or engaged in manufactories in large cities or towns, or in laborious situations, where you are confined during the week to a close and constant employment, possibly you think yourselves at liberty to neglect hearing on the Sunday, and to spend it in public walks and mere recreation. We allow that the inducements are very strong, when to adopt words used on another occasion, *the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, and the time of the singing of birds is come*, to neglect the less agreeable privilege of hearing the sacred word; and to pursue, without restraint, the delightful recreation afforded to one who has been shut up all the week, by the view of the simple scenery of nature, and the refreshing breezes of a pure air. Probably you have no quiet and retired places where you could take a solitary walk to meditate in the intervals of the immediate sabbath duties. Probably the necessities of your family allow you no other day for such an enjoyment. Probably your earthly master would not, or could not, allow you time for such a refreshment. You think it right to obey him, lest your temporal interests should suffer. But—would yon think it an act of extreme folly, and call it a wasteful idleness to be giving the day to wandering among the fields when your earthly master, or your family call you to work, and have you not a heavenly Master, and have you not spiritual necessities? God has issued his command—*Remember the Sabbath-day, to keep it holy!* Will you disregard it? God gives his wages: will you undervalue them? *If thou turn away thy foot from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable, and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words, Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord.* Christians! pure and delightful as are the joys of contemplating the beauties of nature, there are much higher joys even in this world! O, to have our sins washed away in the blood of Christ, and to be justified freely by his grace, to be renewed by his Holy Spirit,

and to have the favour of the Most High, and to become a child of God, this is true happiness on earth! And there are before you, yet higher joys still in the paradise above, *the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.* May the blessed Spirit of Christ give us a taste for these; let us not forfeit these for any mere temporary indulgences. There are pious mechanics who have found those consolations in spiritual liberty and religious privileges, that have made a rich return for their self-denial in pleasures like those which we have noticed. May they not hope also for a special donation of bodily health, in this course of evident duty. Our life is now a life of faith, and not of sense: be not surprised, therefore, if you have to give up some temporal pleasures; those which are innocent shall be enjoyed with a double relish, from being enjoyed without neglect of our first duties. In any case the time is hastening on when we shall *enter the joy of our Lord,* even *fulness of joy.*

But will you still say—Surely we may have Sunday for a day of pleasure. By all means let Sunday be a day of pleasure: but what is your pleasure? Is it idle conversation, feasting, and light and vain company? O these are not real pleasures; they are very unsatisfactory and transitory gleams of false pleasure. *Delight thyself in the Lord,* there is the true happiness of the immortal spirit. Hear and read his word—that tells the labourer of satisfying joy, *of the rest which remaineth for the people of God;* there you have set before you that which will afford you comfort and happiness in all your toils and sorrows. It is specially needful that you should hear, and thus learn divine truth when you can, for you have not time, nor opportunity, for much study and deep learning; and therefore you should avail yourself of those advantages with which you are now favoured. In a Christian country, you have, through a kind providence, ministers appointed to instruct you, whose special office it is to acquire divine knowledge for your edification. In hearing a faithful and wise preacher, you have, in the short time of the delivery of a sermon,

the result of much study and prayer applied to your particular necessities. By due attention to such sermons, joined to your own reading of God's word, you will increase in *the knowledge of the Son of God till you* come to *a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.* Be not, by neglect of such instruction, unhappy in both worlds. Hear, believe, and obey ; and so shall you be blessed here and for ever. Do you say that you are ashamed to appear for want of clothes fit to come in? but are you not ashamed of being away, when the eye of God marks you in your absence ? Do you say there is no room ? I reply, Many of our churches are not ordinarily so filled as they might be! Be in good time, and you will find room. More churches would be built, if those that are erected were more crowded.

Are you SERVANTS? you should not neglect to hear. Shut not yourselves out from so great a privilege, where you have permission to attend, and remain not in any family where you are prevented from hearing God's word. You have souls as precious as those of the highest monarch. You must be happy or miserable and that for ever. Neglect not the grand ordinance of God for your eternal salvation. The truths which you hear, received in a believing heart, will sweeten the bitterest service, will smooth the most rugged path, and infinitely heighten the comfort of the happiest condition. How blessed is the portion of one, whom no outward circumstances can separate from the Father's love, the Saviour's redemption, the Holy Spirit's guidance, and the sure prospect of an eternal glory yet to be revealed and fully enjoyed.

To every human being we say—Neglect to hear, and you fall under the sentence of destruction ; (Acts iii. 23.) *hear, and your souls shall live.* (Isa. lv.) We set before you life and death: choose you this day. Be wise for eternity. As far as you are concerned, let it no longer be the reproach of Christians that three-fourths of those called by the name of Christ, despise his word. Slight not your greatest interest. Believe in God. As He cannot deceive,

so he will not be mocked. He invites now; but despised, he will arise to judge and condemn. O neglect not so great salvation.

We conclude with the words of our Lord,

HE THAT HATH EARS TO HEAR, LET HIM HEAR:

AND

BLESSED ARE THEY THAT HEAR THE WORD OF GOD AND KEEP IT.

Some remarks of Mr. Richardson of York, communicated by my friend Mr. Gray, are too valuable to be omitted, and I add them as a Note.

"You will be frequently called upon to hear sermons in the Church, in which the peculiar truths of the Gospel are not treated as they ought to be, or are too much left out of sight. Under such discourses we are too apt to cavil, blame, and be disturbed with the doctrine, and perhaps with the preacher, and so get no good. Now this is wrong. If there be but one valuable sentence in the sermon, we ought to treasure it up for our profit. If the Lord has taught us to discern good from evil, our duty is to take the good and refuse the evil. Nor should we be severe upon the preacher; but if the Lord has opened *our* eyes, we should be thankful for it. Instead of censuring the preacher, we ought rather to pray for him. Compassion, and not anger, is the disposition that we ought to shew on such an occasion. Indeed, in any case, we shall be sure to receive hurt in our souls by dwelling on the faults of others."

THE END.

INDEX.

PAGE

Address to different classes to attend to hearing . . 262
those in eminent situations . . . 262
those in extensive business . . . 263
parents and children 264
those in inferior situations . . . 266
servants 268
Answers to objections against practical obedience . . 177
worldly interests may suffer . . . 177
the expediency of delay 180
the fear of an odious name . . . 182
the dislike of hypocrisy 183
the opposite opinions of men in general . . 184
Antichrist, Bacon's view of 214
Antinomian, really rejects the doctrine of the cross . 50
Augustine's writings, quoted . . 20, 27, 98, 116

Bacon, his identification of Antichrist with the Pope . 214
Barnard, Sir John, his practice 100
Baxter's Catholic Theology referred to . . . 72
Beveridge, quoted 67, 116, 125
Bingham's Christian Antiquities, quoted . . 28, 29, 98
Blessedness of faithful hearing, ... 246
faculties are employed aright . . . 246
our advantages are improved . . . 247
our knowledge is increased . . . 247
our calling is ascertained 248
conviction of sin is given . . . 249
faith is bestowed 251
justification is confirmed . . . 253
adoption is certified 253
election is secured 254
sanctification is promoted . . . 254
spiritual comfort is advanced . . . 255
souls are ripened for glory . . . 256
perfect knowledge will be attained hereafter . 257
Bradford, quoted, 37, and his works recommended . . 118
Bucer quoted 32
Bullinger, view of true prosperity 20
Burnet's History of his own time quoted . . . 36

PAGE
Campbell, Professor, quoted . . . 93, 95
Cares of the world, hinder the success of the gospel . 196
Catechisms, recommended 159
Cecil's observations on the purity of a church . 223, 263
Chalmers' Christian and Civic economy quoted—Preface vi
Sermons, quoted 234
Christ, crucified, the leading truth of Christianity . . 45
other doctrines flow from it . . 46
his presence, the glory of Christian assemblies . 60
a real presence 62
a manifested presence 63
a beneficial presence 64
through the power of the Spirit . . . 66
to meet in his name in order to enjoy it . . 67
the pattern and model of all Christians . . 173
Christian, the name was once a crime . . . 183
Chrysostom, quoted 14, 27, 98
Church of England, its importance 106
Clement, quoted 7
Cobbett, on prayer, quoted 116
Conversion, not from human power . . . 72
by the Holy Spirit, through the word . . 83
Cradock's knowledge and practice quoted . . . 130
Cranmer, quoted 252
Cyprian's observations as to Bishops preaching . . 7

Dangers in hearing to be guarded against . . . 129
improper motives in coming . . . 129
inattention while there 130
prejudices against the truth . . . 132
not putting away our sins 134
many spiritual enemies 135
Deceitfulness of riches, hinders success of the word . . 198
Delay in attending to salvation dangerous . . . 242
Diffusion of divine knowledge, universal, promised . . 209
the precise blessing to be expected . . 210
the difficulties in the way of its accomplishment . 213
the means by which they shall be removed . 217
the signs of the times indicate its approach . 221
the consequent duties of the church . . 227
Douglas's Advancement of Society, recommended, and quoted 217, 222,
Duties of the present day, individually and nationally . 229

Eastcheap Lectures quoted 8
Edification, does not arise from human power . . 74
but from the Holy Spirit . . . 83
Edwards, President, quotation from . . . 173

PAGE
Election, secured by hearing 254
Established Church of England, its importance . . 106
Faith begins, grows, and is perfected by hearing . . 251
Father, God a reconciled Father in Christ . . . 253
Fruit, seed sown on good ground productive of . . 203
Gilpin's Historical Collections, quoted from . . 144
Gilpin's Lives of the Reformers, quoted . . . 30
Gisborne's Sermons, quotations from . . 168, 242
God despised, when his servants disregarded . 3, 234
Grindall's Letter to Queen Elizabeth, on preaching . 33
Haddon's remarks, on what done to promote preaching . 33
Halyburton's Life, quotation from 244
Hardness of heart, described and guarded against . . 185
Hearers, their duties, to their ministers—to hear them . 100
to esteem them, 101; to obey and provide for them, 103; to pray for them, 105; as to attending their parochial minister, 117; to co-operate with their minister, 123.
fastidious, address to them 124
only, described at length 166
Hearing the word, directions for 127
guard against dangers to which we are exposed . 129
the nature of due hearing 136
hear in the spirit of prayer . . . 138
in simplicity of mind 140
with candour 141
with seriousness 141
with gladness 142
in faith 145
in the spirit of self-application . . 146
in humility 148
comparing all with God's word . . 149
in the spirit of obedience . . . 150
Heathen, obstructions among them to diffusion of the gospel 215
Herbert, quotation from 15
Hey, Mr. his remarks on attending the established church . 120
on episcopacy . . . 93
Hieron's remark on trying what we hear . . . 150
Hindoo Convert, his observation 84
Holy Spirit promised to all flesh in the last days . 90, 219
increase of prayer for 227
bestowed freely on all 89
received in hearing 87
converts the soul 80
edifies the converted 83
glorifies Christ 85
comforts his people 86

PAGE

Holy Spirit seals them to the day of redemption . . 87
Hoornbeck's remark on what the Apostles say of ministers . 93
Hurd, Bishop, quotation from 235

Ignatius, his Epistles referred to 94
Importance of hearing the word 1
its divine authority 2
the weighty interests it brings before us . 4
the appointed means of receiving spiritual good 5
the continued ministry in all ages . . 6
the special advantages now to be enjoyed . 8
the freedom with which spiritual blessings given 10
the earnestness with which God presses us . 11
the word preached will judge us at last . . 12

Jerome's remark on Bishops not preaching . . . 28
Jewell, quotations from 118
Jews, an example of the danger of neglecting divine truth . 229
Jowett's Researches in Syria, quoted . . . 31
Justification confirmed by hearing 253
Justin, the Martyr, quoted 7

Knowledge of the Lord shall be general and deep . . 209
alleviating every evil . . . 210
influential to all good . . 211
a special promise of divine teaching . 213
will be perfect hereafter . . 257

Latimer, quotations from . . 250, 251, 254, 265
Loadstone, the heart of a Christian compared to . . 64
Loss of the soul, described, 51, to be above all dreaded . 179

Maclaurin, quotations from . . . 78, 88
Middleton, Bishop, quoted 21
Ministers, three distinct orders noticed in the Scriptures . 93
their character, duties, reward, and punishment 95—98
address to those who neglect their duties . 131
Missionary efforts, their nature, increase, and success . 223
Motives in coming to hear, improper, as custom . . 167
merely to listen to new things . . 167
resting in the outward bearing . . 167
regard to character . . . 168
to judge the preacher . . . 169
Muir on the parable of the sower, referred to . . 188

National advantages of Britain, to be improved . . 9
owing to the preaching of the Gospel . 38
National benefits of hearing as it regards temporal prosperity 18
brings divine truth prominently forward . . 19
enforces relative and social duties . . . 19
has a remedial power over national evils . . 21

PAGE

National benefits of hearing,
the removal of the ministry a curse to a country . 24
temporal prosperity follows preaching . . 26
Neglect of divine truth, the danger of . . . 229
shewn from the greatness of the salvation proclaimed 230
the conviction of it established . . . 234
the guilt immense 238
the ruin sudden and irretrievable . . 238
the curse of the law upon all who neglect . 239
condemnation at the final judgment . . 239
the enduring of eternal wrath . . . 240
but a limited time to escape . . . 242
Newton's remark on regular hearing . . . 121
Norfolk and Suffolk supplication to Queen Mary . . 32
Objections against hearing, answered . . . 13
we can learn at home 13
there is nothing new in what we hear . . 14
the minister does not edify us . . . 15
inferior objections 16
Onslow's remarks on James the Second . . . 36
Ordinary, term explained 118
Owen, Dr. quotation from his works . . . 145
Parable of the sower explained at length . . . 188
the way side . . . 189
the stony ground . . . 193
the thorny ground . . . 197
the good ground . . . 202
Patronage, objection to Establishment answered . . 108
importance of rightly employing . . 109
Porteus's Beneficial Effects of Christianity referred to . 18
Practical obedience to the word 164
the way to it 171
described 173
its blessedness 175
answers to objections against it . . . 177
Prayer, the word to be heard in the spirit of . . 138
before hearing 151
after bearing 162
Preaching the Gospel a special ordinance for salvation . 42
its rejection leaves men undone . . . 49
its reception connected with salvation . . 53
a means of discovering character . . 56
not prejudicial to states 214
the chief means of diffusing divine knowledge . 217
Prophecy encourages hope of speedy diffusion of the Gospel 221
Providence of God invites to missionary efforts . . 223
Quesnel, extract from his reflections . . . 197

PAGE
Reflections after hearing, its importance . . . 153
Endeavour to recollect what you hear . . 156
Meditate upon it 156
converse with others practically . . . 158
Refer constantly to the written word . . 160
Pray earnestly for God's blessing . . 161
Religious knowledge advancing from the beginning . 209
Richardson's remarks on a thirst for hearing . . 146
Ridley's observation that preaching is beneficial to states . 214
prayer 91
Robinson, quotations from his writings . . 5, 113
Roman Catholics oppose preaching . . 29, 32
no infallibility in their councils . . . 68
Rose's State of Protestant Religion in Germany . . 31
Salvation, its immense importance . . . 230
the misery from which it rescues us . . 230
the way in which it was accomplished . . 231
the blessings imparted in this world . . 232
the height of glory hereafter . . . 232
Sanctification, carried on through hearing . . 254
Sandys, Archbishop, quoted 33
Satan, the great enemy to the success of the word . 191
his temptations restrained through the millennium . 214
Scott, quotations from his writings . . 109, 115
Self-righteous reject the doctrine of the cross . . 50
Sherlock's Treatise on Religious Assemblies, quoted . 107
Signs of the Times, in prophecy 221
in providence 223
Sower, parable of, explained 188
Sozomen, the ecclesiastical historian, quoted . 28, 82
Stennett, on the parable of the sower . . . 230
Stillingfleet, Bishop, quoted 28
Stony ground, described 193
Study, private, a help in hearing 155
Tertullian's remarks on sermons 7
Thorny ground described 197
Tindal, on benefit of preaching the pure word . 40, 252
Usher's Sermons quoted 165, 220
Way side described 189
Wilson's Tour on the Continent, quoted . . . 30
Woodd's remarks on differences of Christians . . 94
Worldly course, scriptural objection to . . . 177
Yates, Dr. his pamphlet "The Church in Danger," quoted . . . Preface, v, vi, and 112

[*L. Seeley, Thames Ditton.*

Princeton Theological Seminary-Speer Library
1 1012 01147 3859